

ASILI

اسيلي

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST MERCIFUL, THE MOST BENEVOLENT



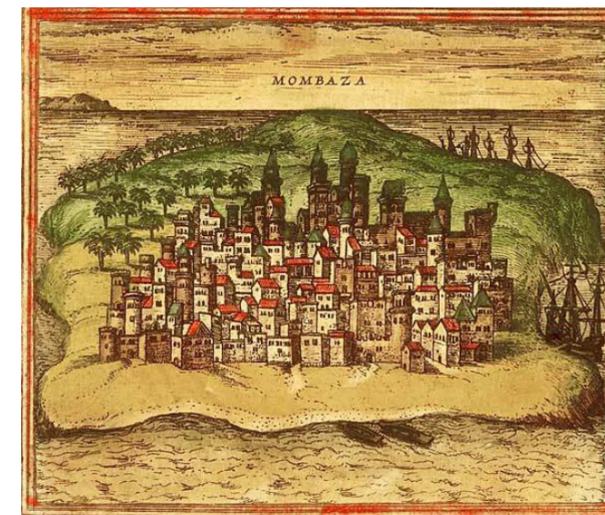
DEDICATED TO MY DAUGHTER, REEM

WE CAME TO MOMBASA,
A LARGE ISLAND TWO DAYS'
JOURNEY BY SEA FROM
THE SAWAHIL COUNTRY. IT
POSSESSES NO TERRITORY
ON THE MAINLAND...THE
INHABITANTS ARE PIOUS,
HONOURABLE, AND UPRIGHT,
AND THEY HAVE WELL-BUILT
WOODEN MOSQUES.



THE COAST IS MY BEGINNING, MY MIDDLE, MY END.

I have nowhere else that I belong and nowhere else that I can call home. I am seeing it, from someone who has lived extensively on the outside, slowly dimming but also regenerating. It is happening on both the collective memory level, and the physical level. All I wish is to add to the voices reclaiming it. To reclaim, to re-engage, to be a medium in the avalanche of reimagining. I dream of seeing my people exclaiming the identity of the Swahili and fighting for it in every way possible. To begin again, to reset, to remind: we have been here and will be here. There can be no separation from the coastal person, wa siwa hili, and the ocean that gave us the name and our lives.





SELF PORTRAIT, PROVIDENCE, 2022.



I INTEND WITH THIS BOOK to be one of contemplation. The contents of this book explore ideas of the senses and its incorporation to the movement of the being. I hope you burn some bukhood, or a candle, and make some chai. My methodology calls for stillness and idleness and in the slowness is where life is lived. This is a principal learned from Mombasa, that yields to its environment and spirituality to inform the daily happenings. I pray that you are in the best of health, and that you allow yourself to wander through this with a quiet mind. This is a place of thoughts, ideas, consideration, and stillness. As we say in Swahili: **كِرْبُ** 🌞



PHOTO BY ALEX WEBB. DATE UNKNOWN.



STILL FROM YOUTUBE VIDEO: THE SWAHILI PEOPLE

ASILI IS A SWAHILI WORD MEANING ORIGIN, SOURCE, AND ESSENCE. It can also mean the fundamental principal of a culture. It is not cognitive, it is metaphysical.



I inherit a tradition that gave voice to 200 million people in the world, yet, there is so little spoken about the source of said language. The work that I do explores the preconceptual, prespatial and pretemporal organization of culture, specifically African culture and even more specifically, Swahili culture.



I use multiple techniques to interpolate a visual voice to an othered people both continental and abroad. I explore the mythoform that connects the mystical and dive into what of it that becomes a practice within Swahili culture. I take experience from my life as a Swahili woman, from the complexity of the language, from the concealed as well as the openly revealed to navigate my process of translating to a visual language, tangibles and artifacts. I delve into rituals, the occult, memory and the incorporation of senses. I explore the cultural creativity that drives the African, the Swahili, and consequently, the spirit.





Let's be very clear. Europe is not my center. Europe is on the outskirts. After 100 years here, did they speak my language? I speak theirs. My future does not depend on Europe. I'd like them to understand me but it makes no difference.

**WHY BE A
SUNFLOWER
AND TURN
TOWARD
THE SUN?
I MYSELF
AM THE SUN.**

سانتا!

ANDIKO HILI NI MUHIMU KWA JAMII WANGU. Warithi wa maeneo ya pwani. Wale ambao hawajaikumbatia lugha tu, bali wanaitazama na kuifahamu. Watokao uswahilini. wanaojitambua, wanaijua kweli, na hawajionei aibu. Ninatoa wito wa kutafakari, kukusanyika tena na kufanya sherehe kwa ajili yetu. Ingawa jamhuri tunazoishi hazitukubali, na viongozi wetu wanaendelea kutusaliti, huku wakizifurahia fahari zetu, kamwe hatupaswi kujisahau. Uthibitisho wa muda mfupi wa uzuri wa sanaa yetu unaridhisha, lakini ni uhai wa maadili na tabia zetu uliotusaidia kutotoweka kabisa. Natoa wito kwa wenzangu, sisi tulio waswahili tuisahau kamwe. 🕌

Kama alivyosema Ibn Battuta: “Wakazi wa huko ni wacha Mungu, wanaoheshimika na wanyoofu, wamejenga misikiti mizuri ya mbao.” Ni wapole, wakarimu, wasiofungamana na ulimwengu huu, huku akizidi kutazama baadhi ya sehemu nzuri katika maeneo hayo, sifa zote ni za Mwenyezi Mungu. Baraka na mapambano kwenye ulimwengu unaotusukuma kuwa kama wakoloni wetu, tukihusishwa katika dini yao iliyojaa uchoyo na ubaguzi. Lakini dini yetu inatufundisha vinginevyo. Kutoa, hata kama tulichonacho ni kidogo, kusimama imara na kujiamini, kwani mbele ya Mwenyezi Mungu sote tu sawa isipokuwa katika matendo. Ninaomba ya kwamba tuendeleo, tufanikiwe, tukue, imani zetu zinyooke, na tujifunze kuhusu sisi kwa undani zaidi.





I OFTEN GET DOMINATED with fantastical thoughts of beauty, the romantic and the surreal. I think about the poems that I've read from Swahili women who praise one another with beautiful items such as teak wooden chests, kohl made from the purest frankincense from Oman, and oud perfume sourced from Cambodia and cooked in Yemen then sold to us, in the Indian Ocean waiting for the dhow to arrive in parcels from lovers in India during the monsoon. Yes, I have a tendency of living in a fantastical, spectacular world amidst the grays and the browns and the cold weather of the West. My thoughts are contrasted against the mechanization of life here. My mind wanders, guiltily, to orientalist paintings of women fumigating their hair by servants. While the paintings intentions were derogatory, I dislike saying this out loud: it isn't too far from the life in what the West has deemed 'The Orient'.



I'm from Mombasa, a world that's been entrapped in time from its inception before even the beginning of Islam. An island riddled by history and politics of conquerors from Portugal to Oman, settled, resettled, unsettled and resettled again, yet forever remaining the same. I came to the US when I was five, remembering my hometown in a hazy, childlike, hypnotic trance. The memories feel like fever dreams at times. I remember stepping on a mosquito coil holder and

hurting my foot and my grandmother holding me and joking about taking me to the hospital while my aunties laughed at my reaction to the threat. How do I capture this? How do I explain to you the heat of the night during the hot season and how it felt better to sleep on the concrete than on the mattress? What I'm trying to ask, rather, is how do I explain to you the relief? My attempt at using my skills I've attained are an attempt at grasping something that feels ungraspable. Can I translate to you a line from a taarab song that hits so close to home you want to cry? I want to explain to you that this is so much more than feelings. This is life for us. We weave sensuality in our lives like needle work on fabric. It's ingrained. I want to let you know that you can't know everything, but if there is something you need to know is that my attempt at capturing the essence of being a Swahili woman is to help you recognize, first, that Africa is not a monolith.

I interchange quite often in the book between 'African' and 'Swahili'. This is due to the interconnectedness of both identities. I do not adhere to compartmentalizing identities as these do not affect the other in its existence. This goes with the idea of nonduality, there is no separation between you and I (unless imposed). If I were to travel to the Congo, I would intrinsically know how to behave in the society, as across the continent, there are unifying factors that are seen throughout. An African can be a Swahili, and a Swahili can be an African, fluidly and effortlessly.



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Second, I need you to recognize that PLEASURE, SENSUALITY, BEAUTY, SPIRITUALITY, POWER are harmonious amongst the collective psyche of the African, despite what ethnicity they may be on the continent. What I am working towards is self-affirmation, I am continuing a legacy of asserting oneself and discovering and rediscovering myself in a world that has deemed my practices to be of lesser value. I am not interested in demanding anything, but I will give you a glimpse of this inner world. This world that has been passed down from woman to woman, by a woman that pre-dates time. I can't show you all of my secrets, because as a Swahili woman, that would be unladylike of me, but I can explain to you, gently, and with a jasmine fragrant nudge, that there's so much more than what you've been taught, than what you've been taught to see, and that it is much richer, much more enjoyable and much more powerful than you could ever imagine.



THERE ARE THINGS THAT
THE SUPERIOR MAN DOES

I understand that Suzanne Césaire was a product of her time and with true Negritude style often uses sarcasm to challenge the norms of conversations of race, but I am making a deliberate effort in not affirming tropes that aren't true as I'm learning more and more the power of language and words and how it can literally shape our reality and our psyche. I chose to cancel this word out to tell you that I do not see anyone as superior or inferior to me. Quote from *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent* by Suzanne Césaire.

NOT KNOW HOW

TO DO:

TO LAUGH, TO

PLAY, TO DANCE.

TO LAUGH IS TO AFFIRM LIFE
IN LIFE, EVEN IN SUFFERING,
EVEN IN THE COMPLEX. TO
PLAY IS TO AFFIRM CHANCE,
AND FROM CHANCE,
INEVITABILITY. TO DANCE
IS TO AFFIRM BECOMING
—DESTINY— AND FROM
BECOMING, BEING.





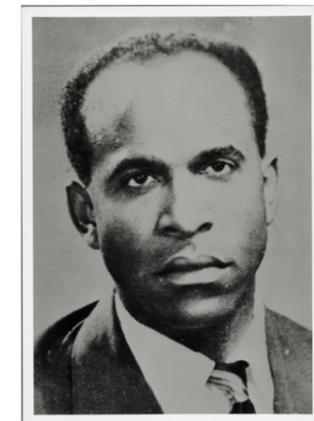
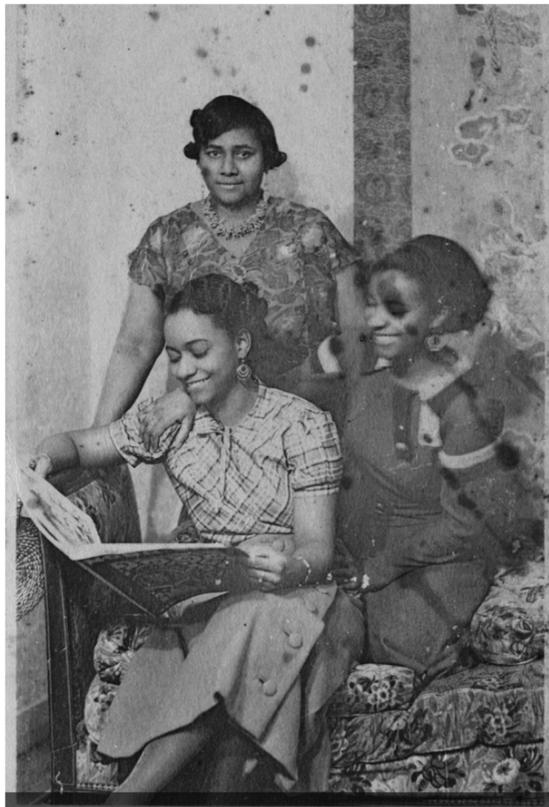
THERE IS AN INTRICATE PLAY OF HARD WORK AND RELAXATION that is innate in the Swahili. We understand when to push, and we understand when to 'tawaaqal' - or to leave it to God. This interconnectedness with knowing when to push and pull is in the understanding of how much an attachment to a man made desire there is. We do not dwell on this world. So when we wake up, it is early when the sun rises. When the sun has reached its peak, it is time to let go, it is not worth it at that point, because it is harmful to yourself. It is the ebb and flow of detachment and attachment that is led by the cyclic nature of man. It is human dignity, self-respect and an understanding that nothing is our own. This knowing propels my work. I understand when to push and when there is nothing there, there is no need to force it. Creativity is not from man, but from He who Created creation. If you have a sliver of these intuitions that push you to create, it is because it was a trust given to you and it cannot be abused.



I PULL FROM THINKERS and imaginers from across the diaspora to further push the idea that these

My entry point into these thinkers begins with the Nardal sisters, who due to being overshadowed by their peers, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, and later Frantz Fanon, are often forgotten in the coining of the term 'Negritude'. I am drawn to what came about in the salons that the sisters held in their apartment during tea and conversation, that lead to huge waves in the later Pan-Africanist movements that in turn lead to the liberation of numerous African countries during the 50's and 60's. Conversation, in private spaces with women at the forefront of hosting, lead to such huge leaps in the imagination and possibilities with African descent people and opens up my world into the idea of a womans soft power. The sisters later on concentrated on feminism, but their impressions are ever lasting, whether acknowledged or not.

experiences synthesize worldwide. From the Caribbean, to Africa, to Turtle Island - it is clear that there is a unifying synthesis that works to predetermine the association of unconscious thought into a force that inspires ritual.



THE IDEAS THAT KEEP RECURRING IN MY MIND are reflected in the famous words of Sembene, the godfather of African cinema, when asked if his work will be understood by Europeans, he told the interviewer, “Why be a sunflower and turn towards the sun, I myself am the sun!” and this one line opened worlds in me that at that point I didn’t think were possible quite yet. The visions that I had were those imposed on me by what I saw in typical capitalistic fashion: study, work, live to work. There was a freedom that Sembene exuded that was beautiful. His stance towards the

Touki Bouki was a film directed by Djibril Mambety Diop that gave me the first experience to Afro-surrealism and the pride of one who wishes to work and live in Africa, despite its imposed poverty. It was an instance in cinema for me where it articulated the unseriousness of being African and still the very real and hard questions of the existence of being African and where we are truly looking for life and why. Abstraction has always been a part of the world on the continent since sculptures and suggested a lightheartedness approach to life that balanced evenly with the true realization of the realities of the material world.

camera, the strong powerful pose of groundedness, that he is there, in his country. There was an interview of Abdirahman Sissako speaking about the film Touki Bouki in which he said “There is dignity in leaving Africa, but there is dignity in staying in Africa.”



New neurological pathways sparked and I was now inclined to move with these new pathways that opened up to me. I decided to allow myself to indulge in these ideas and feel my way through what it would take for me to find dignity in really embodying Africanicity, where ever I am. I followed this inclination until I came upon African metaphysics. The phenomenological ideas of where this Africanicity comes from, despite the perceived hardships, despite the perceived ideas of comfort and success. I want to reach my arms out to something further and deeper and maybe perhaps, with the few skills I have, explore them and expose them. I am seeking to reveal the unseen without really being seen, or only allowing the seen to those who can see.



شانتونزو

ORIGIN



THE PIECING TOGETHER OF AN ARCHIVE that is already broken in half isn't neat nor is it orderly. I put these pieces together with the little that I have, a thin piece of string, pieces of wood and the fantasies of what these memories could have been or are. It is a wonder that I even have this portrait. I took the responsibility of taking it upon myself to piece them together until it dawned that I took more than just a portrait. This is an extraction that happened much longer before me. It was when the world was ending in a second war and my great grandfather needed to find a living. In this journey there was loss after loss after loss and the stringing together of this was the pieces that I have now and the words that I heard drifting every now and then over conversation in the breeze from the Indian Ocean. I am far from where the story began, and now in another nation, now with the luxury and privilege of time and effort to be able to ponder: What is this story? What were the dreams that were lost? What happened along the way? And why did all of this happen?

This tapestry is an attempt at piecing together memories and conversations that have been lost due to poverty, colonialism, greed, secrets, and taboo. It spans continents and generations, and the journey to this has been bittersweet.



BABU

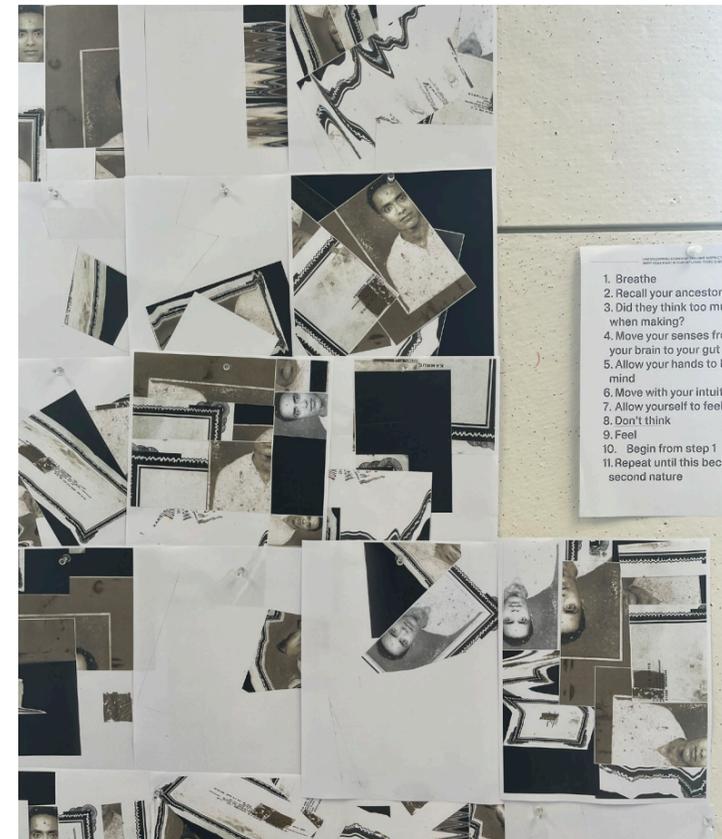
KAMRUDIN BHALLI & SONS.
SPECIALISTS IN:
PHOTO GALERIE
WINDOW GLASS MERCHANT
ALL TYPES OF REFRIGERATORS
P. O. BOX 81022 MOMBASA



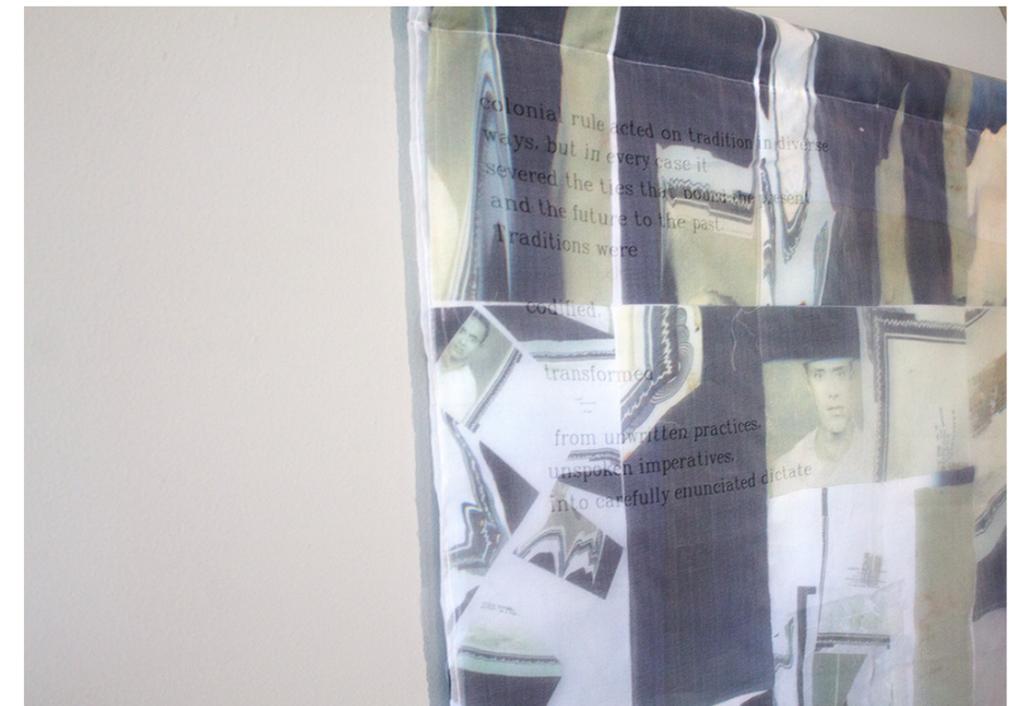


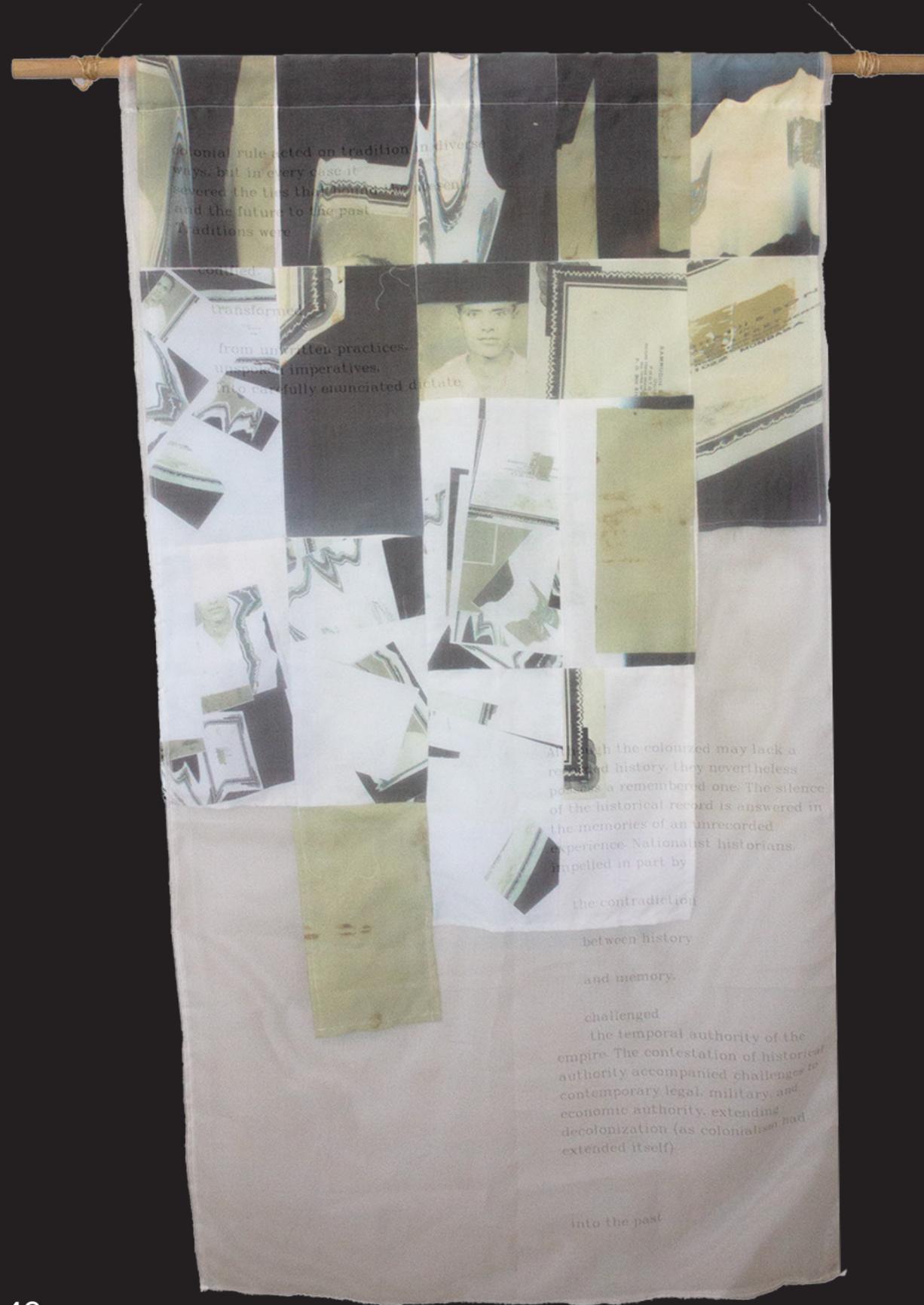
I BEGIN WITH AN ARTIFACT. The only tangible proof that was left behind of our family's history. Near and dear to me, I announced to my family that I would take accountability for the photo of my late grandfather Khamis Awadh Al-Dhau. I grew an attachment to this photograph when I was told the story of the photo of my great-grandfather in WWII uniform on the street in Mombasa. My grandfather saw this photo on the street. It was the only photo of his father and for whatever reason, a reason that is beyond us, he left the photo alone and kept walking. He went back years later to find that the photography shop, as well as the photo, were gone. This story was told to me at a young age, and it left an impression that I couldn't quite articulate at the time. Why did he not return for the photo? Was it written that we are not meant to have proof of our lineage beyond this artifact?

There are dreams within my family that are unfulfilled, unraveled, with questions never asked. I witness curses in my family, due to deep wrenching anger and disappointment. I watched dreams and questions get suppressed left an aching gap that was unspoken in my family dynamic. Being young and still unknowledgable to a larger view of the world, I was angry and thus put blame on the easiest target, my family. Upon experiencing the world however, I realized the questions that arised were relics of colonization. Forgetting does not happen by chance, forgetting was for survival.☉The act of forgetting was just as much of an act like any other act. You do not remember to forget, but in cases of systematized violence that depends on your forgetfulness to exist, it is crucial.



The process began with a series of scans of the photograph and using my hands to explore the photograph in different ways. I continued to do this with the images of the scans and continued until I felt the photograph was dissected enough. The scans were then turned into a tapestry that was printed on fabric.





To work with this photo, I was challenged to create rules. I was also instructed to use analog techniques to explore it. After being fully entrenched in a design process that uses articulation and linear thinking, I challenged myself to use my body. I decided that if I am to do this work, let me go all the way in. To truly embody the process. I used my gut as the driving force for whatever direction this idea will take me. I imagined myself a woman pre-colonization, and used my imagination to feel what it would have been like to create during that time. I humbled myself and submitted myself to the frightening feeling of fully trusting my body. I didn't realize I was disconnected because it felt so foreign! Strange, that we become so deeply disconnected from ourselves when we are with ourselves, constantly. I used my body as a way of experiencing and reflecting on what arose in me when confronting with what was lost and severed in my lineage due to violence or due to poverty. Both of which were imposed and in turn interrupted the course of my family's connectivity to its history.

فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَلِيتَنِي

مِثُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنَسِيًّا



And the pains of labour drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said “Would that I had died before this, and had been out of sight and forgotten!” - Quran 19:24



MARYAM 19:23



UPON MY FIRST THOUGHTS OF DELVING into ideas of pulling from things beyond, I was interested in motherhood and the connection they have to the unseen world from mothers of the highest caliber of manner and existence like Maryam, Isa alayhi salaams mother, or Mary, Jesus's mother, to the woman of everyday in our current world. There are these conversations that happen that go beyond the physical dimension that have to be acknowledged in the pursuit of choosing, or not choosing motherhood. I recall thinking of my daughter, and just the thought of it made me lactate. My mind was in the process of not being with her physically, and yet my body responded in a way that felt it needed to nourish. These kinds of ideas are what push me to ponder on these ideas of phenomena and our connection with the unseen. There was a power in this that I wanted to explore and chose to delve more deeply into the ideas of a transcendent experience that not only connected the matrifocal connection within my lineage, but also women across all walks of life in every corner of the world that span the length of time and multiple dimensions since our existence on this world.



THE FOLLOWING ARE FILM STILLS FROM MARYAM 19:23













I WAS INTERESTED IN THE POWER of being a mother and how that translated to this profound connection I had with things that had never existed before in my inner world. I was a woman before, then I had another human being growing inside of my body. I was a container. I was human and contained a soul. Who is this soul?

We are told that the soul of a being is blown into it at the 40th day

I am particularly interested in the terror, the elegance, the strength and power of childbirth. The feeling of being pushed to your body's limit and pulling from seemingly nothing to gain strength to bring a human being earthside. I am also intrigued by the ability of choosing not to do so, and how that is just as a powerful force. Both require an innate force that is inexplicable, but indigeneity has answers for the 'inexplicable'. The matrifocal strength was to be worshipped and upheld as the beholders of society and excellence within a people. Life, death, and the inbetween spaces are where life happens, and within these sacred spaces of being and unbeing, there are the pockets of mystery. Those deep borrowed spaces between space and time that are the conjugars of light and dark, where pain and pleasure intermingle, are where the birthers dwell. The West is frightened of these places, whereas for us, it is our comfort ground. We borrow our feet on the earth, and explore the depth of the world with our connection to the unseen, with beauty intact.

of existing inside of the body. This small lump of flesh with a beating heart and a personality. It's sustenance while living in the world written until the day it dies. There is a lot of confusion because at the thought of this, it is seemingly an honorable, and large responsibility, and yet it is taken as this thing that is easily taken for granted within the Western context. There was

interest in exploring the imbalance of the idea of choosig to be a mother, and not choosing. Were you a goddess? Or animal? If this is just another human form of biological expression, then why did I cry for this person that I hadn't met yet? Why did the person who chose to sever the tie due to poverty still feel that the child was with them? Where does it come from? I explored these ideas in Maryam 19:23.







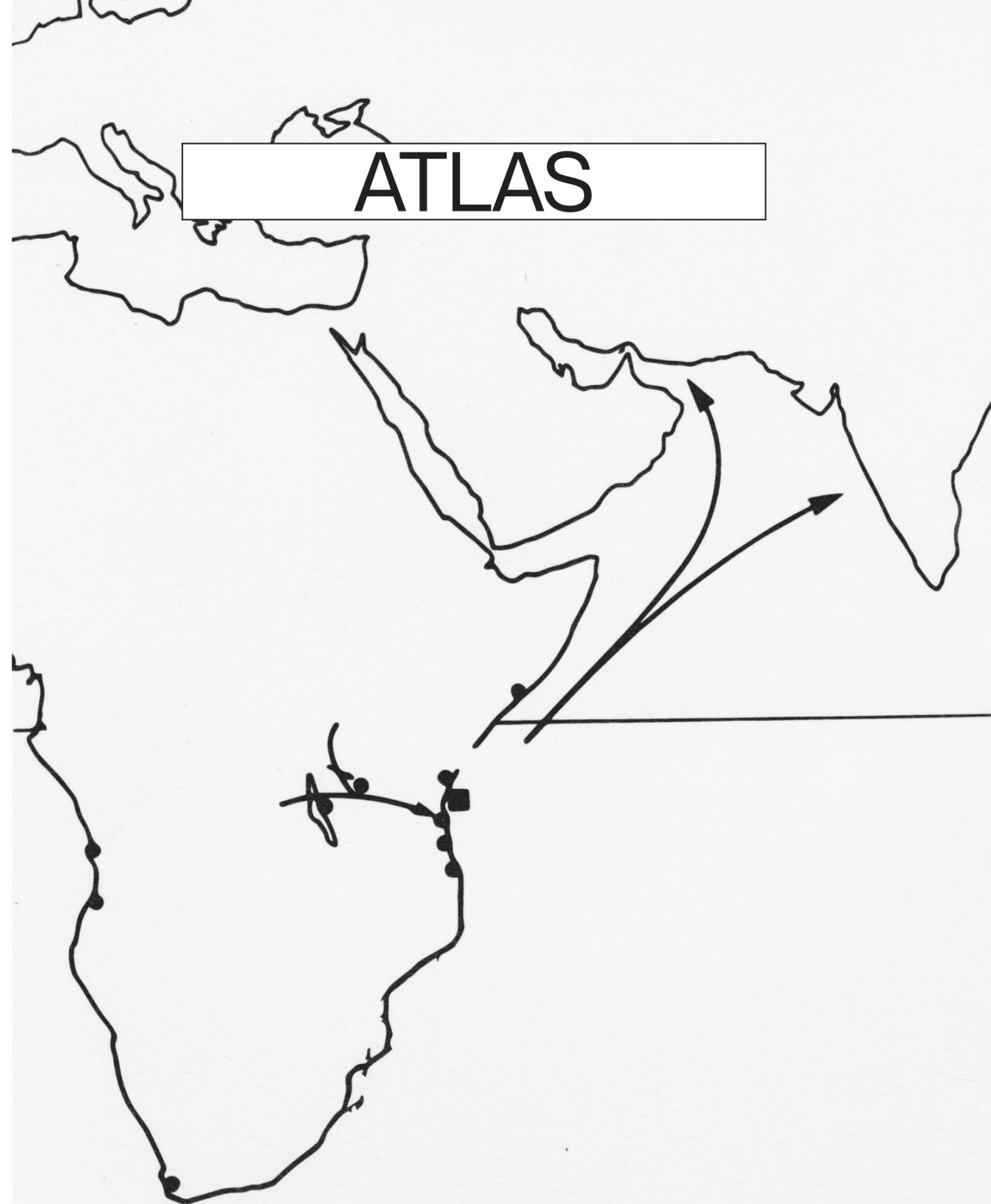
GRAPPLING WITH A NEW WORLD, far away from the familiarity of the south as well as the comforts of rituals that I hadn't quite realized were so imperative to my existence and daily function, I was a student in a place deemed as 'prestigious'. This assignment was one that made me explore my new home for the next two years. I somehow managed to get away from being in



close contact with White American world for the majority of my time in the United States, and being in close encounter with a space that is a graveyard of Indigenous bodies, and a place where Black bodies first had contact from the Middle Passage, was eerie and it felt raw and unhealthy to my mental and emotional wellbeing. I felt the ground pulsating with an aura of destruction and dominance that I hadn't felt in other corners of this country. My exploration and confusion was put into design through ATLAS. A collaborative effort between myself and my cohort, who also were thrown into this

I did an experiment on the Brown Green of placing myself in this very historic and colonial setting, and explored how it would feel to do something that is a truly embodied experience for an African: Dancing. I listened to Awilo Longoba's "Carolina" under this grey sky and extremely cold weather. I did this for three days and by the third day, I was sick of being a spectacle while doing something that gave me so much joy, and just feeling uncomfortable and unable to move freely in a bulky coat and jeans.

new world, perhaps with better tools than myself. It forced me to really dissect just how much of an Other I was. I was an other and I had limited contact with other Others. There was grief. Not just of being placed outside, but also being placed inside. What would I do with this placement in a world that has deemed me as Another, on the 'margin'?



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

- (١) الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
- (٢) الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
- (٣) مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
- (٤) إِلَهِكَ تَعَالَى وَ إِلَاحُكَ تَسْتَعِينُ
- (٥) إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
- (٦) صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ



سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى



رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي



بِسْمِ

(I was accustomed to praying five times a day.)

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ



سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى



السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ



Since colonialism, Africans have, for better or for worse, tended to abandon their habitual holistic approach to knowledge and their conviviality in favor of the abstract, cyclic, linear, and fragmented Eurocentric conception of both the universe and the fields of knowledge. The hardly initiated African--in transition from a tradition-directed to an inner-directed frame of reference--becomes not only mesmerized but in addition finds that information itself has become mystified, transformed, specialized, and alphabetized. Relationships, too, have become dehumanized, impersonal, and estranged. That too is tantamount to Westernization.

(I've had to let go of the ritual.)

A European man stumbles upon an African sleeping by the beach after have finished drinking is coconut water. The white man asks, "What are you doing?" The African replies, "I'm relaxing by the beach." The European looks disgruntled and asks "Well, why don't you do something more meaningful in your time?" The African replies "Like what?" "Like go out and explore! Learn more and more! So that you can work hard!" The African listens then asks "and then what?" The European continues "so that you can work, you can build, and create cities and make businesses!" The African asks again "And then what?" The European exclaims, getting frustrated by the Africans apparent stupidity "Then you can have lucrative businesses, make lots of money, and build more cities and contribute to civilization!" The African asks "Okay, and then what?" The European is flustered now and continues "So that you can use the money you made to perhaps buy an island then relax and spend your off days at the beach!" The African scoffs and kisses his teeth at the whole story and goes back to laying down "Isn't that what I was doing before you interrupted me in the first place?"

(Here, your worth is based on your productivity.)

Western Tradition and Colonial

Dominance

(This is the culture here.)

عالمنا ليس هو
شيء إلا أن
شيء
ما فعل صلوة
أف من بعد



By the time he (the Kenyan) is passed out fit to return home to serve his people he has become a better Yankee than a Kikuyu.

--J. P. Clark

ON BEING VALIDATED THROUGH A WHITE EDUCATIONAL MODEL

“We Africans were to go to the white school!”

Malick Sidibe said this in an interview when asked about his schooling. I’m questioning the need for a White education for the African or black person. The Undercommons, a staple in the academic sphere, probably having been read by many more proficient readers long before I even came to know Moten and his work, let alone even his concepts, was intriguing for me. I was seen in this piece. He spoke directly to me, questioning the very things I’ve been feeling since the beginning of the journey of ‘higher education’: He mentions the idea of the fugitive. The one working, fighting, grappling within myself to try to understand why I felt so outcasted and neglected. Why my ideas weren’t translated as something that was seen. I hadn’t understood, in my naivete, that the work I was displaying was a mirror that many didn’t want to see

“To enter this space is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons. What the beyond of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing; it’s about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection, because one does not possess the kind of agency that can hold the regulatory forces of subjecthood, and one cannot initiate the auto-interpellative torque that biopower subjection requires and rewards.”
—The Undercommons, Fugitive Planning and Black Study, Fred Moten, Stefano Harley

themselves in. A direct attack on the White savior complex that upholds the university space. A questioning and retaliation to the ‘chance’ I was given amongst my peers who hundreds, maybe even thousands, that I, from a small island off the coast of East Africa had been given above everyone else. Was I an experiment? A lamb laid on the stone to be sacrificed? Was I “saved”?

It felt like it all, all at once. I was the rebel, the outcast, the fugitive. I was tricked in by the trickster, I was found lost in the woods that I was lead into but I was too far in to turn back so that I needed to find my way. Moten questions the universities motives in a way I’d never experienced before, a direct confrontation that confronted myself: What am I doing here? What will I do here? He suggests at the very beginning to steal what you need from this space. In the act of stealing what I need, what was the space stealing from me? Because with every energy exchange, there was something given and lost. Now, I am able to answer the question. The loss is exorbitant and I realize now what the university does to you. It makes sense now coming full circle, what Moten spoke of that I hadn’t quite grasped yet being passionate and extending my hand only for it to be smacked by the implicated restraints of what should and should not be spoken of in these spaces.

I hadn't quite understood that my existence in this place, and being deliberate in not continuing the typical cannons of design, put on me a target. I disturb and disrupt the status quo simply through my existence and for that, I will be held down, pinpointed and deflected at all costs. The nature of design is efficiency, propagation, and mass production. I was fighting for everything that isn't design, essentially. No, I am not speaking to you. I speak to those who are Swahili. I am highly specific. I do not wish to mass produce my work, it is only for a few and select of my choice. For this, I will sound like an off-tune record, but in reality, I am moving in the rhythm of my being. Who is it that is a fugitive? If I am speaking to 200 million people, perhaps it is you, who is the fugitive. Running from a past that you must keep quiet and in constraints, that isn't spoken about. I am free from such a history. I speak of mine loudly and with style.

This begins the process of questioning my place not only within the institutions but within the world and thus the affirming of the fugitive begin to rise. How could this be the place that my work would be legitimized? I recall the interview of Malick Sidibe explaining his fathers wish to put him in a white school, and how for many Africans whether rich or bourgeoisie, felt the need to do for true "validation".

Within this fugitivity is privilege. I am aware that out of thousands, I did get the opportunity. I only praise my Creator for this, and with this privilege, it would be frivolous and ungrateful of me to just pander to what the cannons of design are. The thought of being in these kinds of spaces, only to shrink myself into something that dissolves after having money thrown at it, makes me feel ill. I recall a story when I was fifteen, of a girl who was in a matatu with me who was the same age as me at the time. I was in my uniform coming home from school and she told me she wished she could continue to study, but she was forced to raise her sister's daughter. I knew then, that my position is one of power, and with that I needed to not wallow in shame, but to utilize the position that I am in for girls like her.

I can imagine that we are the same age. She is probably raising her own children, or perhaps she did end up studying the way she wanted to, and I am in this country, speaking to her directly through these writings. I pray that she is well. When I design, it is never for myself. I carry the weight of a whole island with me, and the weight gets heavier each time.

کچھ

SOURCE



KANGA



THERE IS IMPORTANCE IN PROTECTING the integrity of this fabric. Africa is a safe space to me because there is still, due to its poverty, this connection with the old world that has become lost due to Americanization. And while poverty is damaging, not having full access to the excess of the West preserves dignity and upholds values that are still contained within the society. Frantz Fanon speaks of the hope that he has in the rural areas of Africa as the places where true liberation can be forged and maintained. Where the elders are the ones who are the legitimate upholders of value and order in the social construct. Due to order and organization that is necessary in the upholding of these values, I paid attention to not veer too far off to the structure of the kanga and its components. Respecting the structure of these textiles is a commemoration of the past. Perhaps it is idealist of me to keep things as it is, the safety of African cultural practices is imperative. We've lost so much already from innovation, let's celebrate things as they are while still fighting for liberty. You cannot change something or innovate when it has yet to be established adequately.

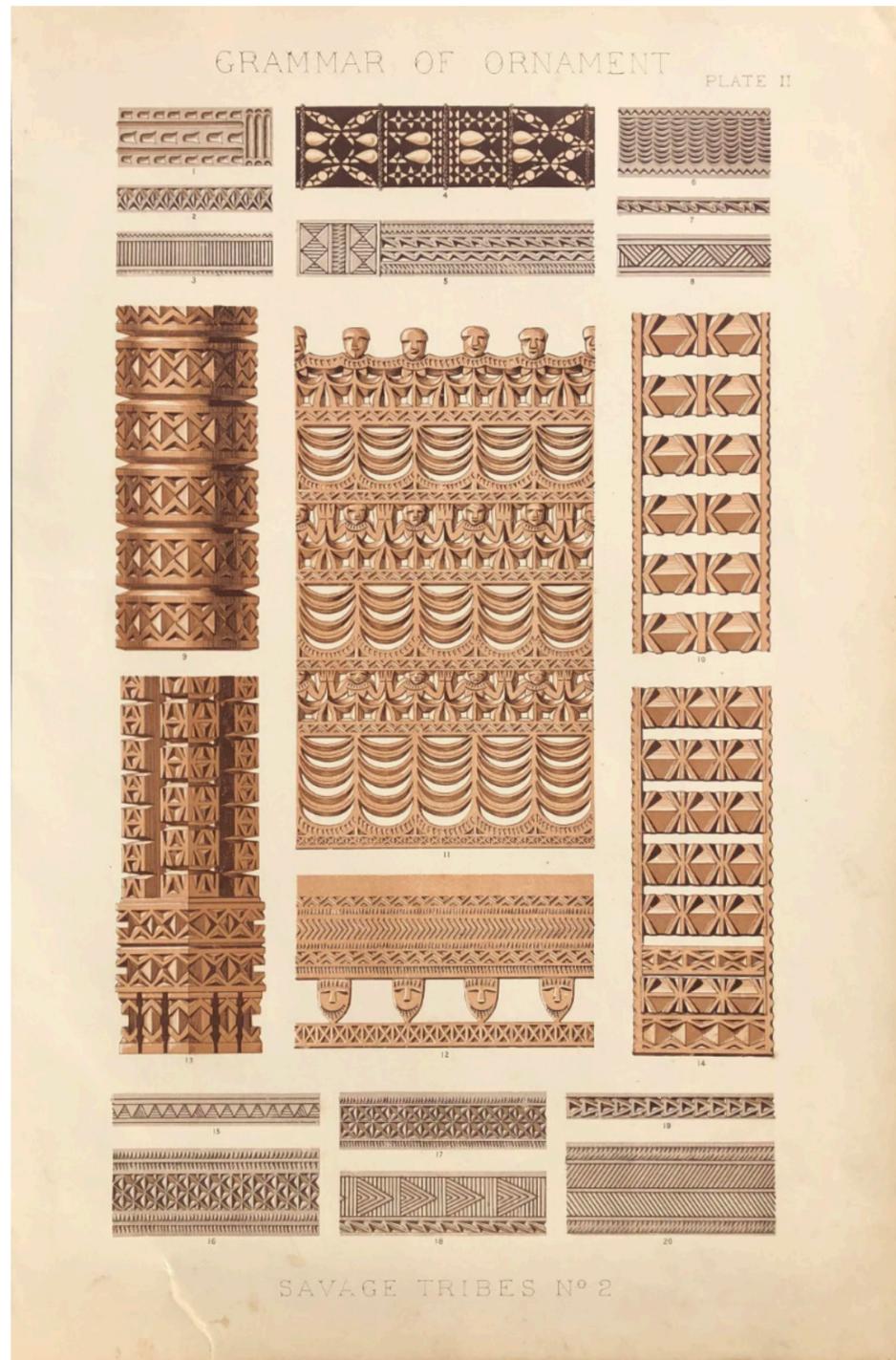
I was intrigued and seduced by the colors and the grandness of the book “The Grammar of Ornament”, a classic in the shelves of designers as a reference for different aesthetics. I was attracted by it, as many of us are attracted by the grandiosity and pomp of the West, with its loudness, and it’s off-tune beats. I picked it up and went straight to the middle of the book where I saw “arabian patterns” familiar, being from an Arab background. I sat with it, then turned to the first chapter.

I saw “Savage Tribes”.

I was perplexed by this term, because they clearly are of African inspiration. Where exactly? I didn’t know. Apparently Owen didn’t either and obviously didn’t even care enough to engage with these patterns to learn who they are. This is the metaphor of the African in white spaces.

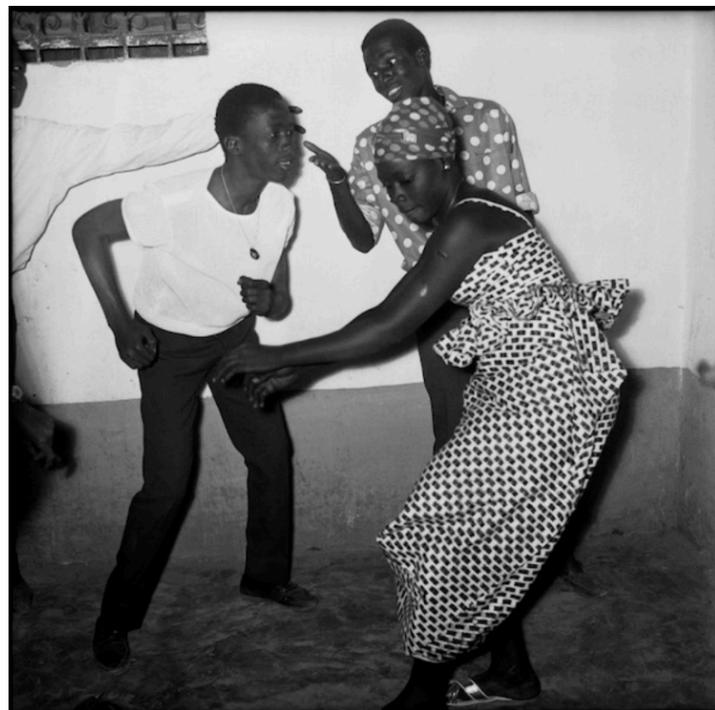
You’re just “African”.

You are not Yoruba, Xhosa, Oromo, Himba, Swahili, Luo, Amazigh, Igbo, Ndebele, Somali, Hausa, Zulu, Kikuyu, Maasai, Malagasy, San, Giriama, Digo, Swazi, Tutsi, Wolof, Wodaabe, Ashanti, Fulani, Dinka, Songhai, Benin - or any of the 3,000 tribes. You are reduced to a savage tribe. Excuse me, I mean African. And the arrogance of white supremacy dictates that you must not differentiate the intricacies of an African person, lest you admit that we are numerous, more complex, and much more nuanced than what your inner white supremacy will allow you to believe.



Emitaï, Ousmane Sembène (1971)

I counter-acted the disgusting internalization of being reduced to a 'savage tribe' by a people whose whole existence and wealth came from barbaric violence and forceful domination and erasure by creating a series of kanga that exuded what I know and understand deeply of being an African. I encounter life on the continent that is unmatched anywhere. An energy so exuberant and alive that you feel it in every inch of your being. It is translated in the rituals of the daily life when you hear the streets coming alive at 7:00 in the morning when the heat begins to rise. I juxtaposed my experience of being on the east coast with the night life Malick Sidibe recorded in his photos in Mali. This energy has transcended through the generations despite the installation of puppet after puppet by the West, beyond the imposed and designed poverty on the continent. Still, there is an elegance, dignity, refinement, and a strong connection to our heritages that can only be described as surreal in the eyes of those that wish for us to hide behind our Blackness. As if there is anything to be ashamed of.



SIDIBE, MALICK. QUI DANSE LE MIEUX. 1965.



I prefer not to make a spectacle of African suffering but to solidify my point, I think often of this image of Nsala who, Alice Seeley spoke of in her book "Don't Call Me Lady: The Journey of Lady Alice Seeley Harris" upon her journey to Congo during the reign of King Leopold II's rule: "He hadn't made his rubber quota for the day so the Belgian-appointed overseers had cut off his daughter's hand and foot. Her name was Boali. She was five years old. Then they killed her. But they weren't finished. Then they killed his wife too."

And because that didn't seem quite cruel enough, quite strong enough to make their case, they cannibalized both Boali and her mother." This is just one account of the millions of atrocities done to Africans and other indigenous people, this one, for some reason, constantly stays with me.

HARRIS, ALICE SEELEY. NSALA OF WALA WITH THE SEVERED HAND AND FOOT OF HIS FIVE YEAR OLD DAUGHTER. 1905.



ONYO! USIWE MTUMWA WA MZUNGU, RUDI KWA MILA YAKO UJITEGEMEE!



KAMA HUEZI KUSOMA HAYA MANENO, JIFUNZE KISWAHILI



MZUNGU AENDE ULAYA MWAFRIKA APATE UHURU



A COMMEMORATION

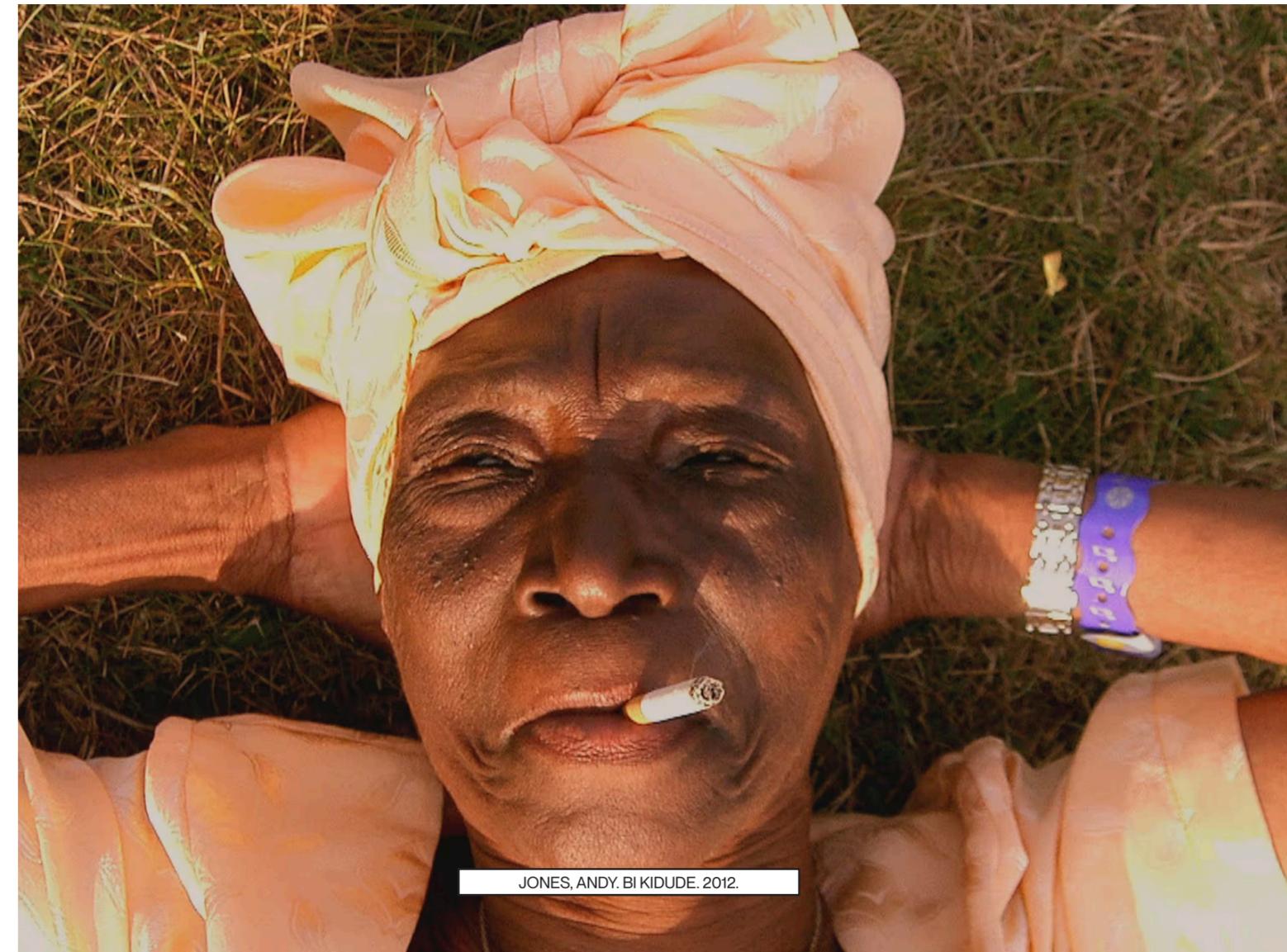
اكو مبوشو
واناوكا
و تراب
FOR THE WOMEN OF
TAARAB



IT BEGAN IN THE ROYAL COURT OF SULTAN Barghash. He wanted music concerts to entertain him and thus hired an orchestra to sing Arabic music in the late 1800's Zanzibar in the height of the Omani Empire. Taarab began to be sung in Swahili to reflect the location and began to be sung by bands later on taken up by women with beautiful voices and linguistic prowess. Siti Bint Saad being the first taarab singer to be widely known and recognized. She became a beloved symbol for social justice for those in the poor quarters of Zanzibar as well as a voice of justice for anti-colonialism, local indigenous folks, and women—rare at the time — especially for a woman who was a former slave. Women such as Bi Kidude, Shakila Said, Malika, and Zuhura Swaleh were renowned singers from what is now called The Golden Age of Taarab. To cement their memory, I created posters and postcards reminiscent of the culture of postcards circulating between Europe and East Africa at the time.

اسمى

كسى



JONES, ANDY. BI KIDUDE. 2012.



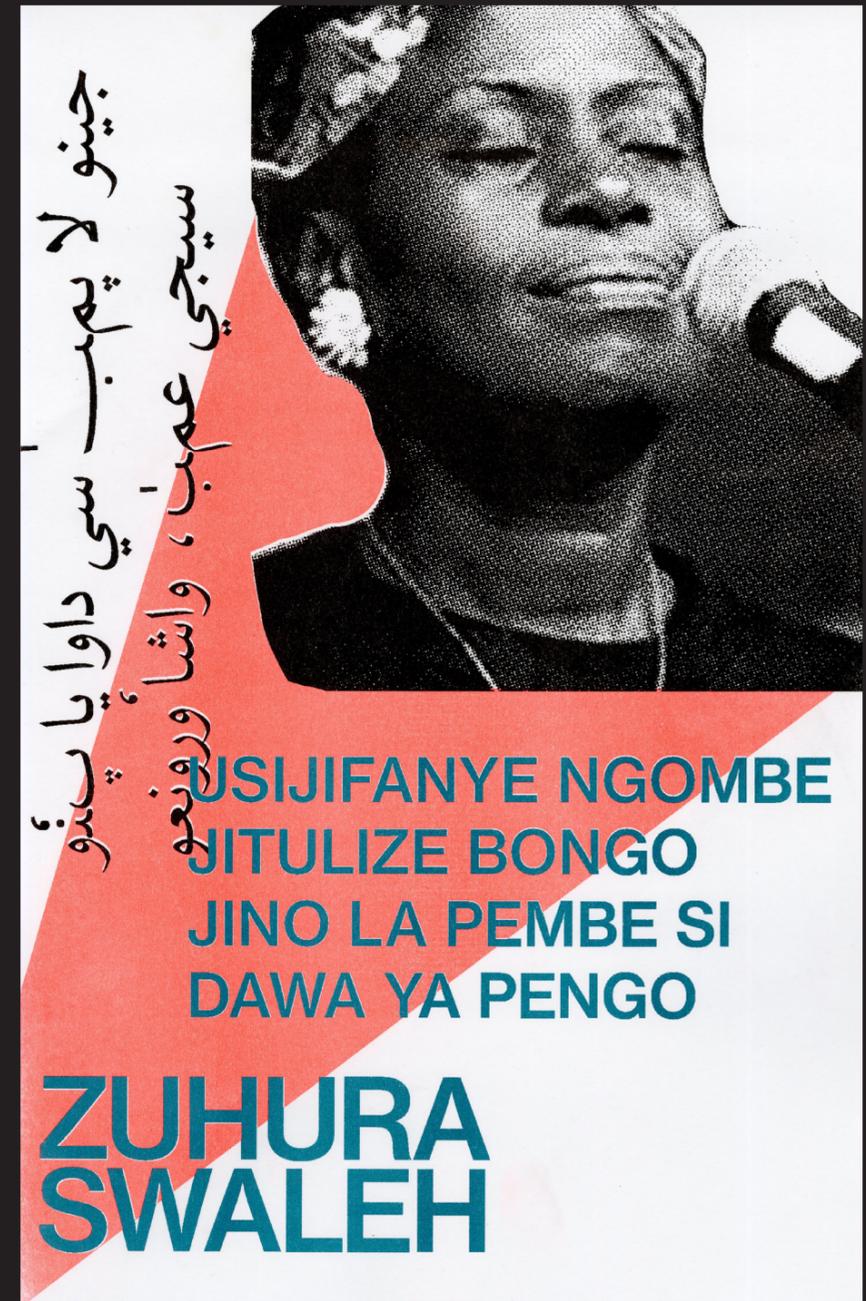


LA CHANTEUSE SITI BINT SAAD, DE ZANZIBAR, ET SES MUSICIENS. 1930.

**SITI
BINT
SAAD**

طازاميني تازاميني
اليفيو فانيا كيجيتي
ومشهو كوا معيني
كومچهيزيسها فوليتي
خينداناي ماعوعوني
كامريجيسها مايتي

**TAZAMENI TAZAMENI
ALIVYOFANYA KIJITI
KUMCHUKUA MGENI
KUMCHEZESHA FOLITI
KENDANAE MAGUGUNI
KAMREJESHA MAITI**





USIJIFANYE NGOMBE
JITULIZE BONGO
JINO LA PEMBE SI
DAWA YA PENGO

**ZUHURA
SWALEH**



طاز اميني تاز اميني
كومچيهيزيسها ماچي
كامريجيسها ماچي

**SITI
BINT
SAAD**

TAZAMENI TAZAMENI
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KUMCHUKUA MGENI
KUMCHEZESHA FOLITI
KENDANAE MAGUGUNI
KAMREJESHA MATI



USIJIFANYE NGOMBE
JITULIZE BONGO
JINO LA PEMBE SI
DAWA YA PENGO

**ZUHURA
SWALEH**



مستكي مستكي
مستكي مستكي

MEPOKUWA MIMI MNYONGE
KUNYANYA SIVA STAKI

مستكي مستكي
مستكي مستكي



طاز اميني تاز اميني
كومچيهيزيسها ماچي
كامريجيسها ماچي

**SITI
BINT
SAAD**

TAZAMENI TAZAMENI
ALIVYOFANYA KIJITI
KUMCHUKUA MGENI
KUMCHEZESHA FOLITI
KENDANAE MAGUGUNI
KAMREJESHA MATI



I WOULD LIKE TO INTERRUPT YOU EXPERIENCING THIS BOOK TO REMIND YOU, IT FEELS REALLY GOOD TO BE AFRICAN



! هـ

STATUE OF LAFCADIO HEARN

Surely it is absurd to salute this upsurge in mid-ocean
standing bolt upright in the claws of the wind
whose heart with every systole pumps out
a true delirium of lianas. Mighty utterance of the carnal earth reduced to
such a
stutter on our slopes! "Who cares, who cares" I heard an earnest voice
cry out
"who cares to have his fill
of Human Soul? Of Fighting Spirit?
Of Inner Essence by whose grace the faller falls only to rise again? Of
Leader
of Souls? Of Breaker
of Hell's Bonds?" Right then and there my auger sight broke through to
hatch its eyes in vision unremitting:

ruddy rums ran from gullet to gullet
but no one of stature replied
and the mucus let force to the bite of the bugs
O strange inquirer
I tender you my redundant jug
as I recite the black vocable
Me me me
for in you I recognized a patience that was molded
in the pilot cabin of a privateer dismasted by hurricane and licked by
orchids

Yé climbed up the palm-tree
Nanie-Rosette sat on a rock and ate
the devil flew around
anointed with snake oil
oil of dead souls
in the town danced a god with the head of an ox
ruddy rums ran from gullet to gullet
in the huts the anise interfused with the orgeat
at streetcorners men crouched over dice and dispatched
dreams through their fingers
men the color of tobacco
slept in the shade with its long razor pockets

Aimé Césaire

FOR WHO ELSE WOULD TEACH
RHYTHM TO THE WORLD THAT HAS
DIED OF MACHINES AND
CANNONS?
FOR WHO ELSE SHOULD
EJACULATE THE CRY OF JOY, THAT
AROUSES THE DEAD AND THE WISE
IN A NEW DAWN?
SAY, WHO ELSE COULD RETURN
THE MEMORY OF LIFE TO MEN
WITH A TORN HOPE?
THEY CALL US MEN OF DEATH.
BUT WE ARE THE MEN OF THE
DANCE WHOSE FEET ONLY GAIN
POWER WHEN THEY BEAT THE
HARD SOIL.



This poem is called “Prayer to Masks” and it was written by Leopold Senghor, one of the pioneers of negritude. Senghor speaks often of this idea of rhythm which I define as a tool to give meaning to the intrinsic connection to land, movement, and the cosmos that shape and define the indigenous. It is a signifier of the connection of man with the movement of the sun that follows the moon in a coordinated dance, that we step to, and these steps inform the practices of our bodies on soil and with others. Manners of speak, and manners themselves are gauged by the rhythm and which step we are in. I recall the mbuzi, or coconut grater, and its symbology with Swahili women in expressing nurturance not just of producing fresh coconut milk, but the rhythm in the erotic to be used as a way of teaching pleasure for you and your lover and husband. It is within this rhythm that life is provided and it can be taught by movement and mindfulness of the beat.



IN CONVERSATION WITH
FEDERICO VILLARO PEREZ
OF MATERIA ABIERTA ON
TEMPORALITIES OF NATURE,
SEPARATION, WORKING FROM
STILLNESS, AND INTENTION



Husna Swaleh Abubakar Thanks for joining me!

Federico Villaro Perez No problem.

HSA Yeah, I'm really excited about talking to you. How was your trip first of all?

FVP Oh my god, it was really beautiful. Yeah, kind of like breath thinking. It was a special place. It was just beautiful.

HSA Amazing. I love that. Yeah, I think it's important to put ourselves in places that are awe inspiring. Humbles you, it humbles you.

FVP For sure, now that's exactly the feeling. I just felt really lucky to be able to be there, you know, and just the presence and the feeling of those landscapes and mountains and lakes just being huge, physically, but also and in the in their temporality. I don't know there was a sensation of just being in a place that has been there for so long and that hopefully will also remain that way longer than my little lifetime. It was just really beautiful. And also the history of the places. Especially in Tierro del Fuego we were just lucky to get to know locals. Yeah, there's some really interesting and important work being done. Groups of people are doing work in terms of conservation, but also in terms of environmental activism and so on, so it was really nice.

HSA Hmm. Yeah. Yeah, I like, putting myself in those kinds of spaces. When you talked about temporality it reminded me of...It's Ramadan right now, so we're fasting, you're supposed to be in a place of really deep spiritual work, but I'm doing my thesis right now, so I've been just able to like grab a couple things here and there whenever I can. But I remember thinking of this lecture I was listening to and it was talking about how the mountains will be raised up and then turned into dust and you know that idea of like this temporality. You know, seeing these big structures that feel so grounded and seemingly that they could never change I think it's like a very entitled way of seeing nature thinking that we are just going to have these things for the rest of our lives and our kids lives, etc. It's interesting to think about that. So I don't know that just kind of came up when you were telling me about being in that place.

FVP Right. It's also changing really fast because of human intervention and climate collapses. The glaciers are really quickly melting so there was also this sense of abundance in a way. There's so much water and we were able to drink water from the waterfalls and from the rivers and from the lakes. There's so much abundance, but at the same time, everything feels fragile and at risk and really rapidly transforming. And there's also a sense of urgency. There's a contradiction and yeah I just felt really lucky to be able to be there and see so much richness.



HSA We are definitely in a place of having to deal with these notions of death and life in a very quick and urgent way. I mean, it's really incredible to see.

FVP Hmm.

HSA I've never been exposed to so much death in my life since October seventh and it's been astonishing honestly really rocking me to my core, in a good way though. I'm allowing myself to witness it but also in turn talking about contradiction... abundance, as well as loss. And I think that's what happens when we are bearing witness to these things, we're starting to really cement these idea of what we have and what we don't have and what we can have. All of these things come up. Thank you for sharing about your experience there.

FVP Thank you for asking.

HSA I wanted to get into what my thesis is about.

FVP Sure, yeah, I would love to hear that, yeah.

HSA So, the way I got into my thesis was I started reading this book called Yurugu by Marimba Ani and it's an African-centered critique of European cultural thoughts and behavior. I came into the school trying to get my grad education rather naively. I'm not gonna lie, I came in pretty naively thinking that these ideas of mine that I previously had which were just an exploration of Swahili culture in general thinking that they would just be well received and celebrated and I got a reality check about what is deemed as "Good design". "Good design" is never mentioned. I mean, we're in an art school, so we're allow kind of that openness, but there is the implication. Have you experienced that within the design sphere in your personal journey within the design world?

FVP For sure. There's canons, right? And I think that those structures and those value assessing structures are determined by institutions such as schools, right? So I think that academia and design are new. I think that we can think of academic design as a newish discipline and in that sense I think that there's also a disciplinary insecurity that turns into rather firm expressions, kind of affirming disciplinary canons. So, I have definitely experienced and I think that even thinking about design is charged with ways of thinking about aesthetics and ways of generating hierarchies around what might be deemed as good or bad design. I think that's implied just in the disciplinary element of design. It's hard to escape it, you know, it's really hard to escape it, especially when you're, like you and I, have been educated designers. So it's really hard to once you incorporate embodied cannon. It's really hard to see the world through different eyes and to really take a step beside that and appreciate, you know, other forms of aesthetic expressions. And I wonder if that step aside is rather a step aside from the design discipline as a institutionalized form of aesthetic expression.



Right: Dante, Homer and Virgil in Raphael's Parnassus fresco (1511)
Opposite: Tierra La Fuego.
Source Unknown.

HSA Hmm. Yeah. Yeah, I get that. Those are really similar to the thoughts I had coming into it and those are the ideas that were coming up as I was moving through the program and kind of allowed me to land into the questions that led into my thesis that in turn lead me to getting this book, because I was very confused all of a sudden. I was like, okay, so “I understand that there is this canon that we are being taught and it’s a very specific kind of design that we are told is “the way”. I remember having very long discussions about modernism and post-modernism and then those ideas being pulled from constructivism and where even that came from, which was the history at the time of World War 2 and so the question is: Where does that leave me as a black African woman?

Designing for Swahili people in the coast of Kenya, you know? Is my voice included in this and you know that’s when I started thinking. Where does it come from? West Europe, okay. I don’t know what that is really. Like I’m not familiar with it actually. I was taught the rules but I don’t actually know why it was deemed that post-modernism was the end all be all. Why was the Swiss design this amazing thing? We learned so much about Experimental Jetsets and how they were very praised in the spaces that we were in. They do great work, but I didn’t feel familiar to it. So I read this book. Marimba Ani did a very comprehensive study on European culture from an African perspective, which I really appreciated.

I’ve been reading this book YURUGU by Marimba Ani (shows book) it’s thick. I haven’t finished reading it, but I’ve just been pulling some bits from it. And she coined this word *asili*, which is a word that she took from Swahili language, which she uses it in the same exact way. She came up with this methodology of studying European culture that can be applied to anything. So *asili* is kind of the essence and the origin and the source. Which is exactly the way it is described in the Swahili language as well, then it’s broken down into *utamawazo* which ways of thinking, *utamaduni*, which is then the culture. And then there’s the other one as well, which I think she talks about *utamaro ho*, which is the spirit, the spiritual aspect of it, right? So she gets into these things very, very clearly and gives very detailed ways of looking at how the European phenomenon has infiltrated so much of our ways of being.

And I really liked her explanation and in a nutshell one thing that she said was that basically all of Western pedagogy are just Plato’s footnotes. She talks a lot about Plato as kind of him being the catalyst for everything that we’re thinking about. He really kind of solidified this idea of like separation. That he tends to do with his ideas of kind of emphasizing thoughts, rationalization and intellect as the only Way of really being a fully set human and it challenged me because I was like that is not how I have existed. I don’t exist in that way, I’m not in my head. And I didn’t understand it at that time. What are you thinking about that? Do you agree with Marimba Ani in that sense?

FVP I think that it’s really interesting everything that you’re saying and It’s challenging, right? The design cannon... to approach it not from the lens of thinking or rationality both like from the lens of the relationship of spirituality and grounded cultures and also specific ways of thinking, right? I would love to get a better understanding of the notion of *asili* to be able to speak more to that specifically, but you said something about separation and the way in which Plato understands the human experience and the relationship with thinking and there’s this idea of separation in the core of the modern project and predictor also of globalization. You know like production and distribution of goods but also the distribution of culture. So, I feel that modernism was really successful in separating aesthetic expressions, right? Design and places. Design and specific cultures and it’s the project of universalizing but also generalizing form, right? And it becomes really palpable if you wish, because it’s a project of averaging, if you will, again aesthetic expressivity. So that separation of specificity, cultural specificity, and aesthetic form is the project of industrialized modernism which design is incredibly complicit, right?

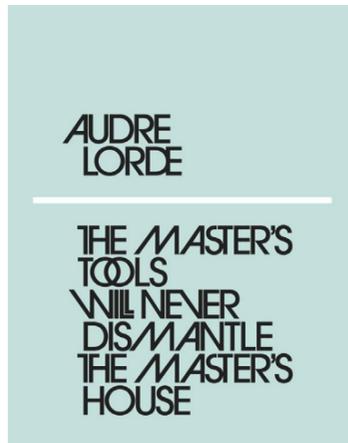


Left: A meeting of the research committee, c. 1967. Nebiolo typeface development meeting.

And specifically when we talk about design, we should also maybe try and define how we’re understanding design but institutionalized academic design, you know, like MFA level design education in the United States or in Europe and how it really appeals to that. Ways of thinking about that sense of separation. So I think that also the history of modern design is definitely attached to the industries and to technologies and to efficiencies and that’s why letter forms look the way in which they look because they were made by machines that had certain standards and so on and the same in the digital age, right?

We have certain tools that allow us to do certain things. And patterns emerge in relationship to the tools of industries and it’s a project of averaging visual culture. And that’s why we might not always feel in profound contact with the ways in which the forms that we see in Swiss design or in certain versions of design because that’s not what we’re seeing...It’s not close to where we are, what we’re seeing in the streets, what we’re seeing in the ways our communities communicate with each other... and that act of separation it’s critical to understanding the disconnection that you might be experiencing between the forms, the elite academic design circles and the communities that you’re interested in continuing working with on the Swahili culture. I think that you’re identifying something that is critical, which is kind of like the separation between places and the project of universalized modernism.

HSA There's a good thing that is happening. I could say there are these discussions that are coming up more often and they're being really thought of very critically. And I think the main question is "What is the role graphic design playing?" In the current world landscape that we're in. Is it helping? Is it not helping? Is it still propagating something that is harmful. The discussions are there, which I do appreciate and I'm obviously adding to that conversation. We are adding to this with the work that you're doing and hopefully the work that I hope to be doing once I'm finished. I wanted to ask, you know the saying "The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house." I think you know the quote, are we just using the master's tools? I just wanted to see, do you feel like we are adding or are we extracting with graphic design?

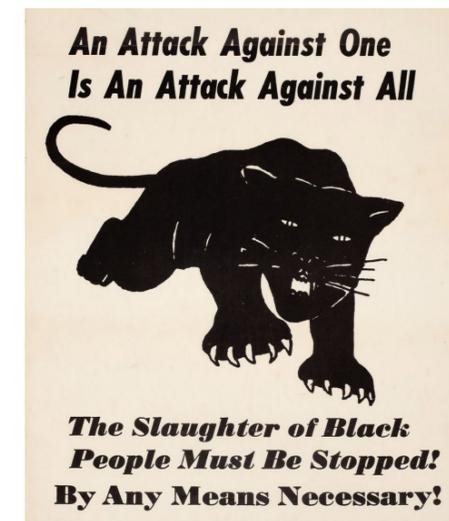


FVP That's a difficult question. I think that it should be answered by many people and I think that there are many different battle grounds and there's different scales and differences. We're talking about time, there's different priorities, there are different ways of thinking about impact. I think it's important to dismantle things from within, you know, I think that that's a work that needs to be done and those are roles that are critical in order to try and build different worlds. I think that approaches have to come from many different places and we have to work within and against structures of power, right? And in that sense, I think that it's important to do academic work. I think that it's important to be able to develop relationships with institutions. I think that it's important to work with governments. I also think that it's important to work against all of those forms of institutions if we want to build different versions of society and ways of organizing ourselves differently. So, there's work to be done, within and there's work to be done against. And again, I mean, we're talking about the possibility of stepping aside, right, of escaping. It's really challenging, right? But we shouldn't feel guilt about our complicity. I think that we should challenge ourselves to revisit that complicity and try and do our best to challenge it, but I think that we are embedded within really violent, incredibly complex structures of power and it's incredibly difficult to take that step aside.

So I think that yes, I think that we can work with the masters tools against the masters. And I also I think that design, graphic design, itself has its limitations in the sense that it's hard to understand it beyond being a niche sort of discipline. There's many larger subjects that we can approach through design, everything that we know. Everything that we can imagine can be explored through design communication tools. Information technologies, like the history of language, and many other things that can be explored through the design, tools and the design knowledge is but I think that it's more interesting or more important than to try and fully understand what the role of design is as a discipline than to try and rechannel the tools that we learned. We are in the design industry, the design discipline, and to explore and to generate and to explore other more urgent things. I think that the question about the limits of design is less important and yes I do think that there's definitely ways to think about ways to make actionable gain as a designer. You know how to communicate with people, right?

HSA Yeah.

FVP Yeah. Like, you know, how to work together and create a pamphlet, there's many things that are important for organizing.



HSA I agree. Yeah, I think that, I have had the chance to be able to really think about this and I definitely feel like I come to a very similar conclusion - well not a conclusion- but rather just like a direction of not condemning myself for being in this industry. Because I'm here for a reason. There was definitely a reason why I have the skill that I have. You said something that was really important was making sure that this thing is just a tool, a kind of gateway. I see kind of a gateway or you're using this because within our cultures, we understand very powerfully how beauty can really inspire people. You know, within different cultures. The West has used it in a pretty negative way, I think, over the years. But I think that for us, we really do realize that it's a way to connect to a world beyond us that can inspire things. Movements that can inspire. Goodness to be spread into the world. And, that's actually what my thesis is about. In a nutshell, that's actually what it is. What is that essence that moves indigenous people that moves African people that moves these populations to resist and not just resist but to create beauty and to allow these energies to transform within the plight of their populations...that's what I am interested in. However, I do it through an African lens and a Swahili lens because I refrain from trying to speak for everyone, but I do know that anyone who is from a colonized background will be able to connect with the thoughts that I talk about within my thesis book.

Opposite: Cover of Audre Lorde's *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*
Left: (Black Panthers) Robert Brown Elliot League. 1968-1970

FVP I loved that you were talking about movement, right? Because that's such a different way of talking about movement in a couple of ways, right? But like what mobilizes people, what most people, what inspires people.

But also before a few minutes ago you were talking about not necessarily carrying that much or like coming to design through thinking about it and through rationalizing it but through doing it through experiencing it, through engaging with things that are around you through just being present in the world and that's a completely different approach to making or to designing which is really attached to rationality. And I find it liberating. And I think that it incorporates the body and incorporates different sensibilities. And I think that it's the way in which we should appreciate design that comes from relationship between a person, a culture, a space, and also again in industrialized canon that you have also acquired and I think that it's a complex mix of things but it's enriching to think about design and that might not be coming from a cerebral way. Not that thinking is not involved, but also just being able to incorporate it into the equation. Just the presentness of our bodies.

HSA Yeah. When I got into school I noticed there seems to be a disconnection with the way that the institution wants me to work and the way that I produce. I really had to sit down and think about the methodology in which I am able to make things and I realize that it actually did involve movement. But I feel like movement can be, within many indigenous cultures, expressed in very different ways and, stillness is also a movement, but it's just much more invisible. And that caused a lot of friction within myself being in this place.

We're all constantly producing and moving so quickly. And I was able now to really say, 'okay, I produce from stillness'. I have to sit with this thing. I have to allow myself for these things to come to me. Because I am aware that they're not coming from me. I think that's an arrogant way of seeing design that these things come from us. Now that I'm thinking about it right now as I'm speaking to you, I'm like, maybe that is the reason why the Swiss method of design had to be formulated because there were these rules that needed to be set in place to allow quick production, like it makes sense. But where is it coming from? And, coming from an Islamic background, there's a lot of emphasis on intention.

FVP Hmm.

HSA What's the intention of creating this thing, right? So I also really pay attention to that when I'm in my process. What is the intention of me making this thing? If it's just for a quick buck or something, it would be completely devoid of any kind of feeling because I'm just doing it for a very nefarious reason, a superficial reason. And I've had a little bit of push-back for demanding the respect of allowing the stillness. I need this and having people telling you like you're not working enough... I am working so much. I'm exhausted at the end of the day because I'm sitting with it. My inner world is like on fire! The outer isn't, and I think that this kind of reinforces the idea of like aesthetics within the European point of view of 'if you don't see it, we don't believe it'. My question for you, saying all that is: these methodologies of design that we're taught have you found them to be effective? Now with the knowledge that you have and with the direction that you are taking with your design practice. What are you thinking?

FVP In the realization of these relationships between productivity and the efficiency of certain design and the speed in which certain things can circulate faster than others, which is related again to what you're saying about like these symbols of productivity and of making and also this culture of objectification but also again, separating what's happening within the world of objects and the things we make...

As if those things we make would be coming from ourselves but also the only things that people can make, right? Things will be happening within.

There's an obvious relationship between the speed of productivity and the efficiency of certain versions of design. Also to the history of modernism and post-modernism, European design and so on, but I do think that those trajectories, those ways of organizing visual code which are within the design discipline are closely attached to the history of industries and technological possibilities and so on. the speed of things and that urgent impulse of making, its attached to capitalism obviously.

You know you like to work in silence, to work slowly and to be still. And that doesn't mean that things are not happening, right? Things are happening that are at a different pace and things are being challenged. We started this conversation talking about the geological temporalities of mountains and in contrast to the speediness of the cities we live in and that doesn't obviously mean that nothing is happening in that mountain or in that river, right? Many things are happening, it's just not necessarily at the scale that is demanded by capitalism. I think it's hard to recognize those things are indeed moving or not moving, where things are indeed happening but it's especially hard to notice it when value is mainly attributed through the metrics of industrialized knowledge. But I think that is revolutionary, thinking about graphic design from the lens of stillness in a highly fast... It's a really fast changing industry and so many things there's like a skip to it and I know the program and there's also a pressure to make stuff right and I'm sure that it's uncomfortable to be in the position of working through your ideas but also through your feelings, and through your spirituality.

HSA And it's interesting because we're not just in graphic design anymore. Now we're in the academic design world. It's interesting to think about that because traditionally, academics have a very long time, like 6 to 7 years to think and to formulate their ideas if they're in PhD. They have very long stretches of time to really research, to sit down with these ideas to be able to flesh them out. And then we're juxtaposed to design.

FVP I also like what you said about intentionality. I wonder how you think about intentionality or like putting an intention towards the work, because I think that's interesting about the idea of an intention is that there's a degree of consciousness that might be rational, right? There's a recognition of what it is, is that we want to achieve or around the motivation behind things, the decisions that we're making and how organizing our energy around and that intention. But there's also a strong sense of intuition. Like something that comes from a different place, and that moves us. And that intuition that...I don't think that drive is the right word, but that thing like everything else that is moving us towards, that is motivating us, that is not only rational, is also part of our human mechanisms and that inspire us, makes us want to make things, but also engage deeply with the world's around us. So I was just wondering how you think about recognizing the possibility of motivation from a rational point of view.

HSA Everything is very deliberate, I think. There's kind of a very deliberate way of moving through life. That's where these rituals come from, right? It's from this very careful way of thinking about our engagement with the world and kind of that non-dualistic way of experiencing and I think of it that way as well. It's because this inclination to create something is coming from beyond me. It doesn't come from me per se. I'm just the medium to express this thing. That means that it's a ritual. And with that, there are steps to take in order for you to get to complete the ritual, right? We have all different ways of doing rituals. There's ways to pour tea, there's ways to make bread, there's ways to put on our shoes. And it goes for making and I think that's the gap that I have with this concept of constant production and efficiency.

FVP I think that there's often the demand for worth. To make sense of what we're making, I think that there's a difference between the way in which you're speaking about intentions and be able to rationally make sense or explain something, right? And I think that sometimes in design, we tend to confuse conceptual typeness and historical clarity. And I think that when you were speaking about intentionality, you're not necessarily talking only about that degree of rational consciousness and clarity around what it is that you're making but also these rituals that might not always be easy to explain, right? Or should not necessarily be explained, but they are felt. That they're inherited. That make sense in experience but not necessarily explaining it. Those traditions that are indigenous to places and to communities are in contrast, right, with the rules of Western, European, Contemporary American design system. I think it's important to continue in reaching that idea of our intentions reason beyond and beyond the possibility of making sense and being able to explain it within the context of design theory seminar. There's things that are just felt.

HSA Yeah, they just are.

جوہر

ESSENCE



THIS WAS AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH in which I learned under kungwi the art of unyago. Kungwi are women who have inside knowledge of important rights and rituals for young women that get passed along generationally by conducting initiation rites according to your age. Kungwi hold authority and status in the social fabric of Swahili society due to their extensive knowledge of meaning and the methodologies of practicing these rituals. Kungwi have cultural authority and tend to be leaders amongst the women of the community. They act as initiators, mediators, entertainers, as well as medicine and spiritualists for the society. Kungwi are upholders of the culture and experts in the art of Swahili societal conduct, etiquette, manners and craft. In a modernist shift within society, their teachings uphold the culture.



NDANI

NDANI

MAFUNZO MATATU YA MWANAMKE

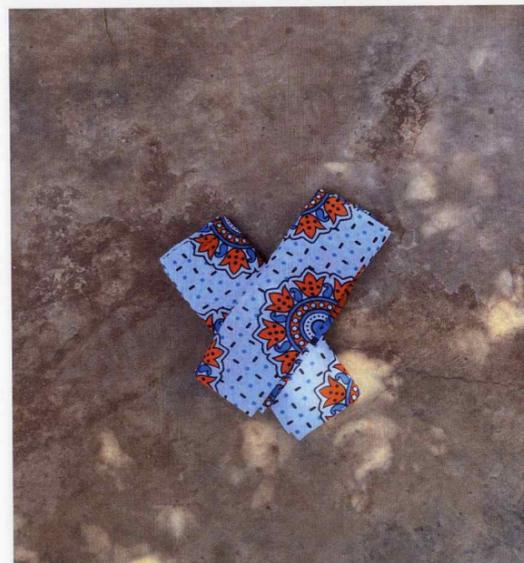


LESSONS FROM A KUNGWI, UPHOLDERS OF FEMININE
KNOWLEDGE WITHIN SWAHILI CULTURE

NDANI



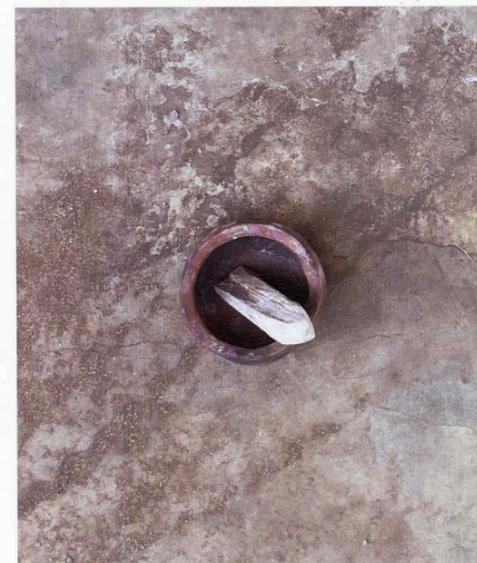
GORA MBILI ZA LESO



**WATUMIA LESO
KUJIFUNIKA,
KUPENDEZA,
KUSTIRI SEHEMU
ZAKO ZA SIRI**

LESO LAZIMA ZIWE SAFI NA
WAEWA KUMVALIA MUME
WAKO NYUMBANI

LIWA YA KUSAGA



**NAMNA YA KUSAGA
LIWA INAFUNDISHWA
NA SOMO WAKO, LAKINI
LIWA LAZIMA ITUMIKE
KWA KUONGEZA
UREMBO WAKO**

LIWA NI MBAO WA SUGUA KWA JIWE.
YANGARISHA NGOZI, YATOA UCHAFU
KWA MWILI NA WAEZA KUMPAKA
MUMEO ANGARE PIA

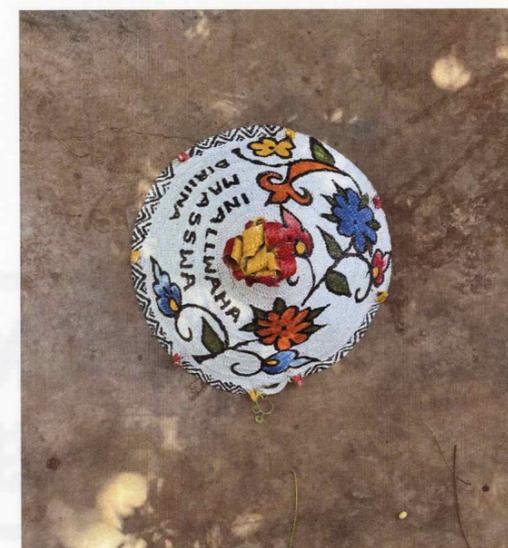
MSWALA (MKEKA)



**MSWALA INA
MATUMIZI TAFAUTI.
NI MAHALI YAKO,
YA MWANAMKE
KUSTAREHE, YA
KUSWALI, YA
KUMKALISHA
MUME WAKO**

KAA KWA MSALA YAKO, LAZIMA
UEKE SAFI, ISIINGIE NA UCHAFU,
MSAWALA NI MUHIMU KWA
MAISHA YAKO YA NDOA

KAWA



**KAWA WATUMIA
KUFUNIKA CHAKULA,
KUFUNIKA SINIA
AMBALO UMEWEKA
VITU VAKO NA
WA MUMEO**

CHAGUA KAWA AMBALO IKO NA
MANENO MAZURI, AMBAI ZITA
PENDEZA KWA NYUMBA YAKO



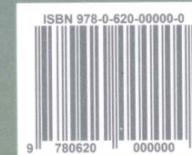
LWA HUSAGWA SAA KUMI BAADA YA KAZI ZA SIKU 2023, MOMBASA

**ENDELEA KUSAGA MPAKA
YATOSHA KUPAKA KWENYE MWILI
NA USO. UKISHAPAKA, KAA NAYO
MPAKA IKAUKE AMA LALA NAYO.
UTAONA USO YA NGARA, RANGI
YAKO ITATAKATA, NA UCHAFU KWA
NGOZI ITA PUNGUA**



LESSONS FROM A KUNGWI, UPHOLDERS OF FEMININE
KNOWLEDGE WITHIN SWAHILI CULTURE

DESIGNED AND WRITTEN BY HUSNA SWALEH ABUBAKAR



POEM “UTENDI WA MWANAKUPONA”
WRITTEN BY MWANA KUPONA, 1858,
PATE ISLAND



THERE IS RELEVANCY IN THE MUNDANE ACTS OF THE FEMININE in that within those acts is where civilization is born. While the conquests are just as important, what happens when the conquering is done? Who comes to soften the blow of the spear? It is the rituals of the women, who come in, with their incense, and hands to create homes on the land and give way for a society to thrive. Siri Ya Mila pulls from poetry written by Mwana Kupona, a noble woman in Pate Island in 1858. She writes to her daughter the rules of good conduct as a woman in Swahili society, as well as reassurance of the need for her to spread goodness in the world, privately and outwardly. The piece celebrates and pays homage to the women who teach me, guide me, inspire me, and celebrate with me in every step of my life, just as Mwana Kupona did for her daughter, and how I hope to do so for mine. It is proof of the importance of matrilineal heritage that is to be passed on and never forgotten.

SIRI YA MILA





1//

NEGEMA WANGU BINTI,
MCHACHETU WA
SANATI
UPULIKE WASATI
ASA UKANZIGATIA.



9//

NIKUFUNGIE KINDANI
CHA LULU NA
MARIJANI
NIKUVIKE MKE SHANI
SHINGONI KIKIZAGAA



ZESHA



NIDA NZITO KHANGA PAMBA YA T

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SOMANI NYUATE

HURAMU

MAANA

MUYAFAHAMU

MUSITUKUE LAUMU

MBEE ZA MOLA

JALIA





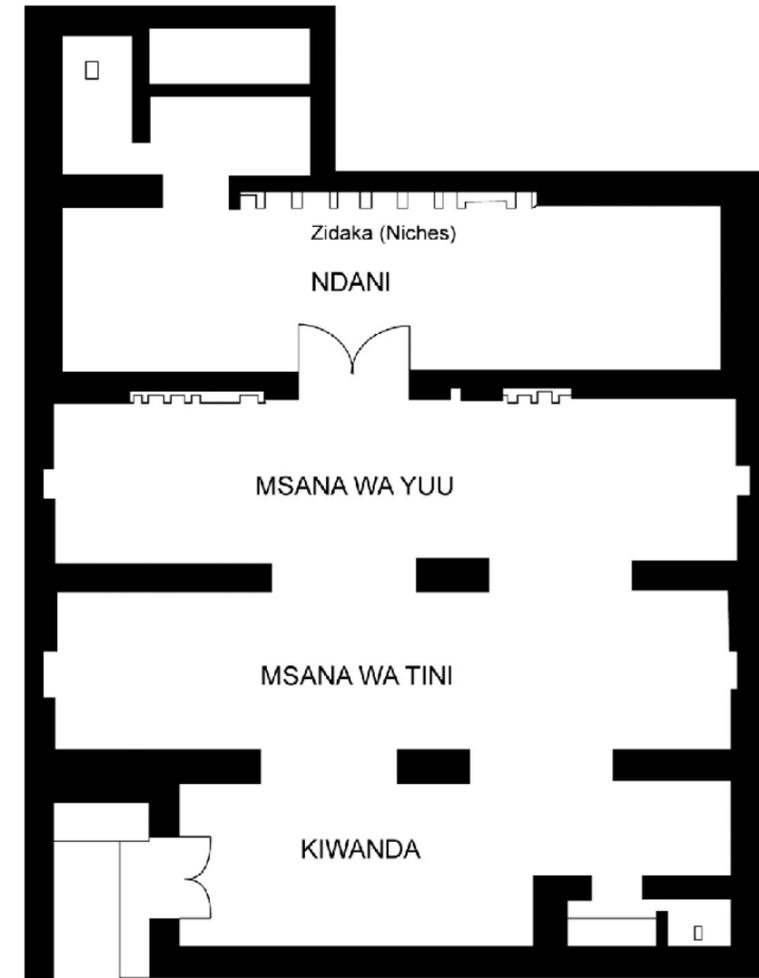
NDOTA CHA NDANI





I'M EXPLORING THE INNER WORLD OF SWAHILINESS through a hypnagogic state. I'm imagining this space as if it is a Swahili home. There is the kiwanja, there's the msana wa chini, there's the msana wa juu then theres the ndani. The innermost space, the hidden parts of the mind that rarely is expanded on. Here lies the module for the everyday choices of the going ons in that space. We fulfill our domestic duties and the manifestations of these actions ruled by that which is inside, hidden away. Within each level is a way in, deeper.

We are not afraid of this, we welcome it. We knock on its door, we respect that space, we remove our shoes, and we enter and leave when implied to leave.





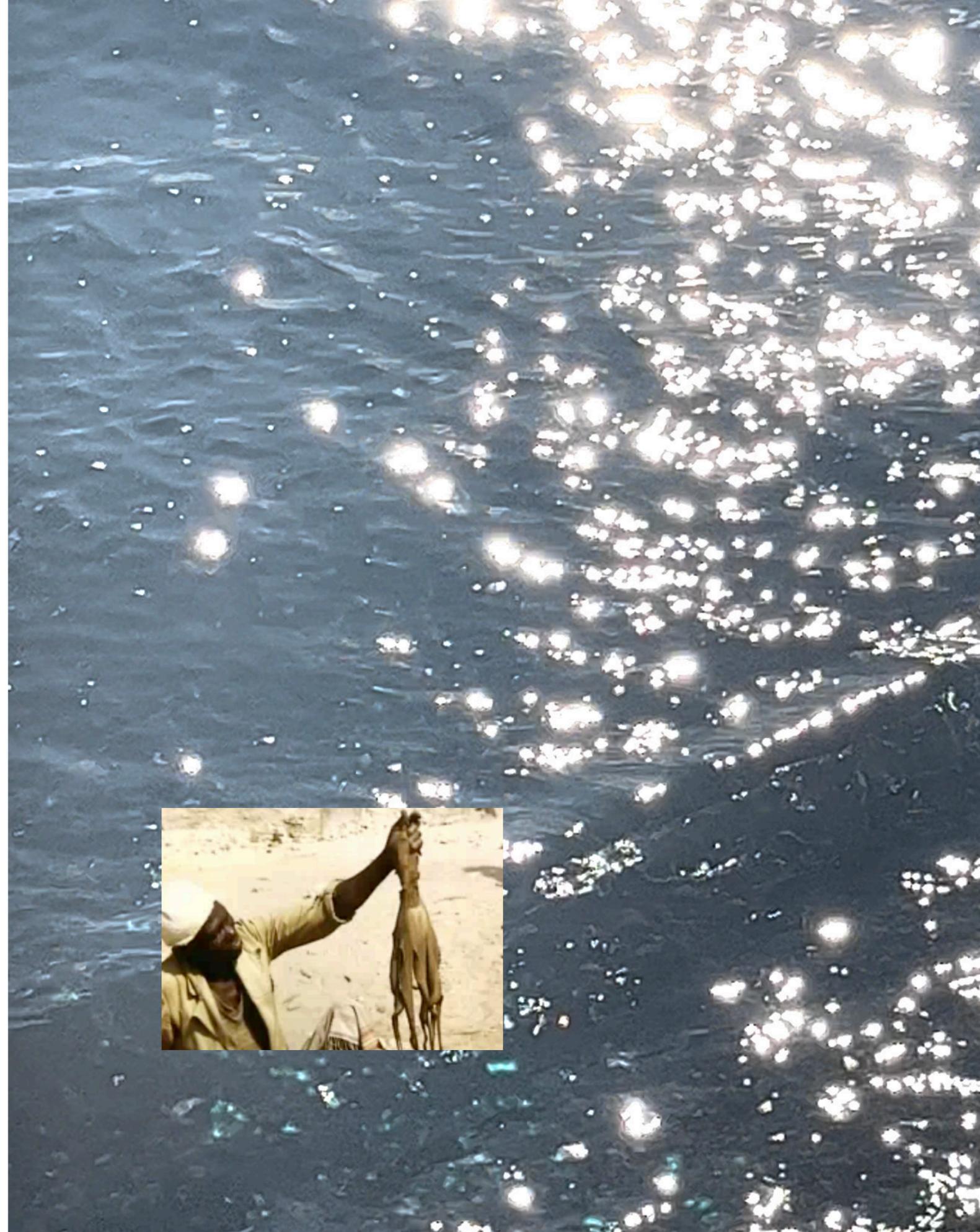
There are everyday fractals of the mundane that display themselves in the hypnagogic state when the mind hovers between awakesness and dreaming. These are the references that the mind plays behind your eyes before the soul takes a place outside of yourself. This is an incomplete process, however, as a completion of the process would mean death. These are the moments before even that separation occurs. Because of the nearness to the metaphysical world due to the nearness of death through the process of sleep and falling asleep, we are confronted with the images that are beyond us, have passed us, and symbolize our future events. In the West, dreams have been reduced to just the brain processing information and thus are not relevant to pay attention to, save except for Carl Jung, but this was information we had known centuries ago.

I do not dream often, but when I do dream, it stays with me. I dreamt of my grandfather, wearing all white, smiling and laughing gleefully at me. I was told that this is a good sign, and that perhaps his sins have been forgiven and that he is comfortable in his grave. The feelings that linger after having dreamt, stay with me for the rest of the day and depending on the significance of that dream, my life. I once heard my mothers' voice calling my name as clear and sharp as if she was next to me. I am astounded every time and shaken at how real they can feel and have come to understand that dreams are not separate from life, but an integral aspect of experiencing life and a hint of the metaphysical world. They are the portals to not just the inner world, but of the outer, expansive world of the unseen.



Memory relies on the continuing existence of physical traces produced by members of the society in their activities. The dream world, takes these memories, reintroduces them to the one experiencing the dream and conceptualizes it in a way that the person can not just re-live the memories, but feel them as well. The visceral experience of experiencing in hypnagogia, where you have not yet fallen deep into the deep state of dreaming still allows one to view the visions, touch and smell, but not quite yet fully immersed as the soul has not yet ascended from the body. You are in free fall.





MSANA WA JUU

THE FOLLOWING ARE STILLS FROM THE INSTALLATION NDOTA CHA NDANI

Hodi.

Sema hodi.



YOU ARE ENTERING A SWAHILI HOUSEHOLD. Remove your shoes, kiss the hands of your elders, and take a seat. You are upon the first level of this house. This is where you mostly reside. This is the outer world. If there is a memory that marks my mind and continues with me wherever I go, it is the sound of the ocean that surrounds me. There is nowhere that I can look on this island without the peak of water. It is what has shaped me and identifies me. A coastal person, a person of this island. It is the temptation of those not accustomed to it, and with that temptation, the greed of conquering and conquering it. The elder men sit on the baraza as they discuss this. I hear their voices, disgruntled and frustrated. Some hopeful some in disarray. I am unable to recall the particular conversations, but I can feel the remnants of the particles of the past emerge in this space. The dwellings of the outer come to the inner. The womans fruit who is selling outside comes inside, so does the fish of the day, the potatoes, the vegetables and the pickled mango and chilli. When we hear the athan, it is the cue to go inside before the heat of the day scorches. When you see the facade, it is unassuming isn't it? You are not allowed to stay here.















I am in the threshold

of the experience

of experiencing.



I HEAR THE HARD RAIN OF THE DAY THAT FALLS in the open space of the home. From my room I hear the chatter of the visitors and their children. The children play and begin to run then get scolded to go outside so as not to break anything in the home. There is no unfamiliarity in this place. Everything I see is within my reach and grasp. I value the comfort of the voices that gave me shape and form. Matriarchs of the family with their strong and shrill voices. Beautification rituals that happen when the men are gone, the dyeing of hair and fingers up to the arms and the palm of the feet. I drift back and forth as if being swayed in arms. I recall the shape of the ylang ylang flower I picked from my grandfathers garden. The yellow petal and the thickness of it, it was the fragrant part of the kikuba that was pinned to a brides dress. I was too young to know the meaning at the time. I was young and naive. The fragrance of oud comes from the inside, I wonder if my mother is there. It's my favorite room in the house.



MSANA WA CHINI















NDANI



THE VIDAKA IN THE ROOM ADD A CHARM that I've never been able to explain. The high bed made of teak wood feels so sturdy and it has tall legs that would allow someone to be able to sit under it. When I'm in this place, the scent of oudi lingers from past days that it has been burned in there. This is the container of the dreams that I had as a fully grown woman, or so they say I am. If the outside world is for conquest and for rizk, what is the inside for? I imagine a place to process. If I close my eyes, I can see behind my eyelids the turmoil of losing yourself in the attempt of grasping an ideology that isn't yours, and still holding on to what is yours currently. Which is more important? Which one are you willing to fit into your open space? The back and forth motion of the woven fan relaxes you and gives you some redemption from the heat of the day. The prayer mat on the floor faces the kaabah. There's nights spent there on it with your forehead pressed against it begging to the Almighty to be free of the grasp this world has on you. When you wake up inside the mosquito net, you realize that your chest has lightened, but the burden hasn't. You're comforted by your things. If you burn frankincense and praise the Prophet, there will be wishes placed on you by your family for wellbeing. The energy from the outside is different from the one in here and when you step in, it is within your duty to change that. You are the one in charge in here. This is your domain. And within this space, what would you like to experience? What takes over you here? Madness is a place and you dare go there in your domain. You allow yourself full pleasure with your halal. And you allow yourself the destruction of your form in the form of giving life. And also in your soul. You beget your soul in the soul of the home with its lime plastered walls that hide the happenings inside of it. Internally and externally. Sasa uko ndani.

Usiogope.

Karibu nyumbani.









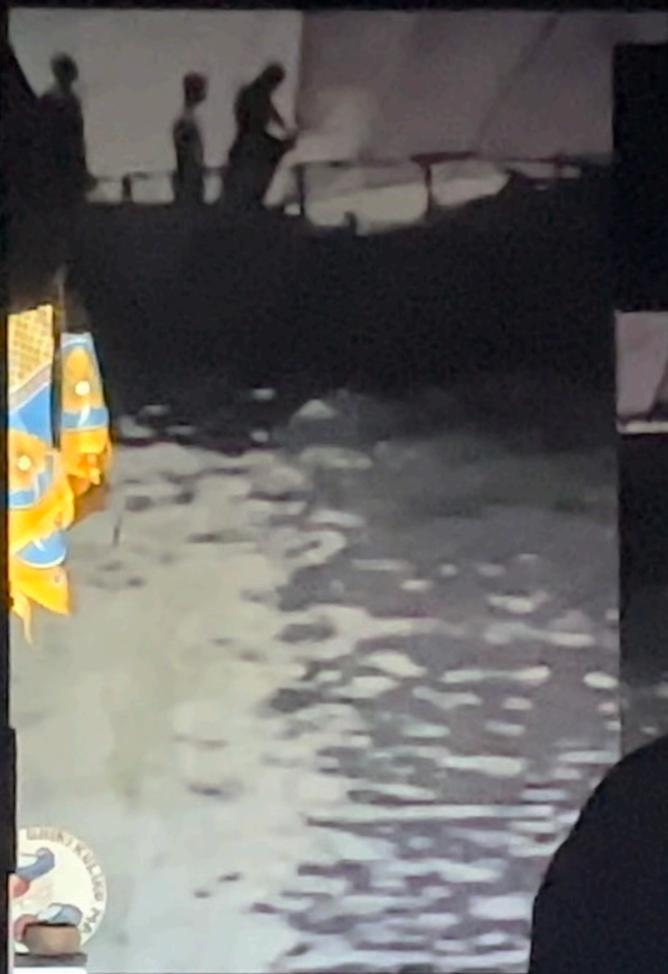










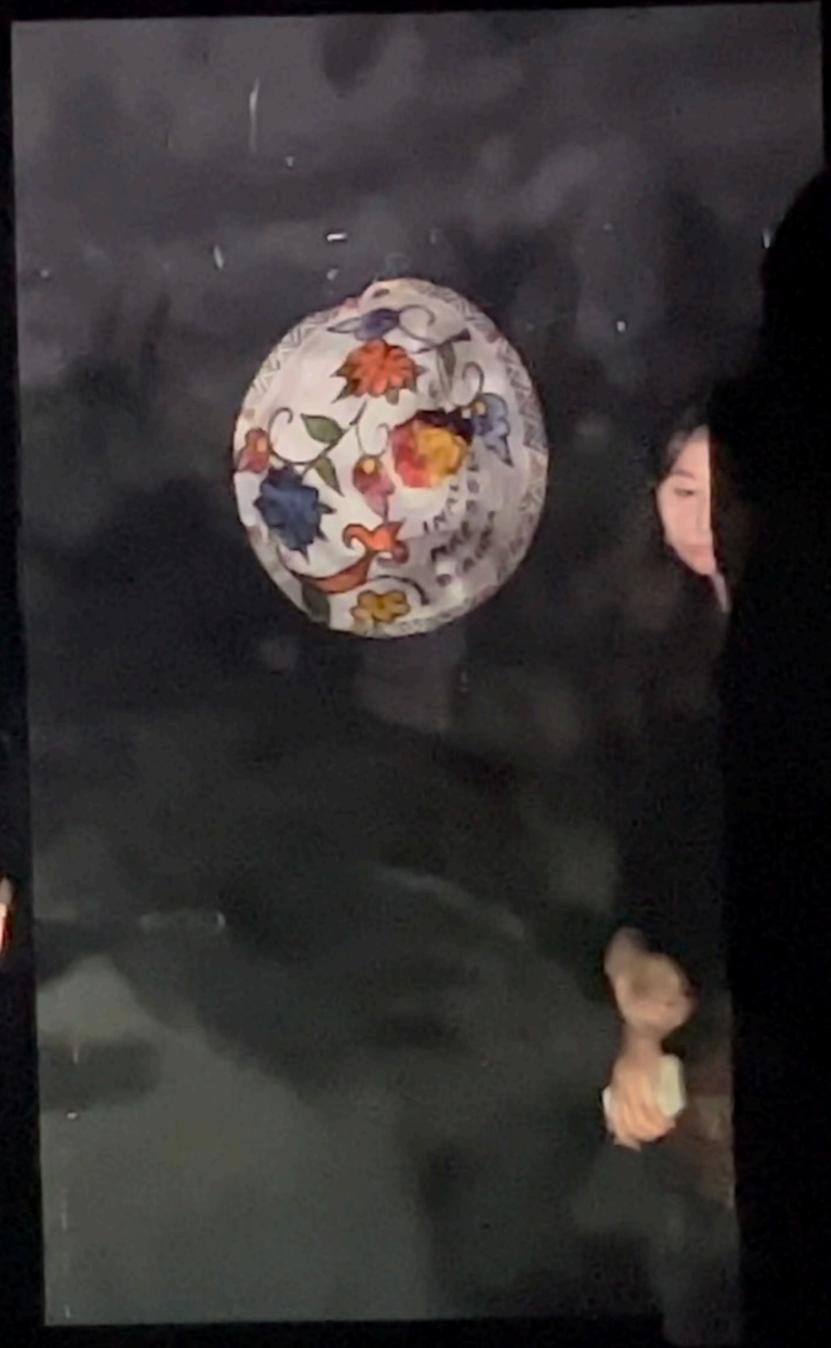




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Jambo fulani hutokea unapoamua kuamka na kuufurahia uzuri wa uweusi wako. Uweusi, Uafrika, au vyovyote uwezavyo kuuita (hii ni kwasababu ya kukosekana kwa ufafanuzi mwingine kama inavyoonesha tunaishi katika ulimwengu wa ubaguzi wa rangi) pale unapoanza kujiona tofauti na kujitenga na tamaduni za Ulaya/Magharibi unakuwa na thamani na hatimaye unastahili kujiita 'kamili.' ... Sifa, vyeti, diploma, mishahara, mapambano, akili, uwezo uwezao kuutumia katika nguvu kazi yako, ujuzi ulionao katika uongozi wa watu, ujuzi ulionao wa kuipa nafsi yako tumaini, ustadi wako katika kazi.... Unapoanza kujithamini kama wahenga walivyojithamini. Unaporudi kwa yule aliyekupa kusudi la kweli, si rangi uliyonayo, bali moyo wako, ardhi, kumtafuta Mungu au nguvu ya juu zaidi, na ya kwamba kulikuwa na uhusiano wa asili na wa kimetafizikia ambao uliruhusu wewe kuwa hivyo. Unapoweza kuanza kuitenganisha taswira yako na ile iliyolazimishwa na utamaduni wa patholojia ambao ni utamaduni wa mamlaka za juu za watu Weupe Ukamilifu huchukua nafasi, kisha utaanza kujikomboa na kujiwezesha. 🌀



BECAUSE WE DON'T DEPEND ON LANGUAGE, we simply depend on the experience which is the language for us. It's not a verbal communication but it is a living translation of reality. We envelope ourselves so deeply into the process of living until there is no interpretation.

There is no translation necessary. You experience it. Whether its hunting and gathering, or dealing with what is called death. It's the same to us.

It's all a ritual. It's all a ceremony.

The western mind in its positivistic thinking, it's pragmatic, logical way of looking at it. It's linear and empirical way of understanding... finds it very, very difficult to understand tribal ways of life.

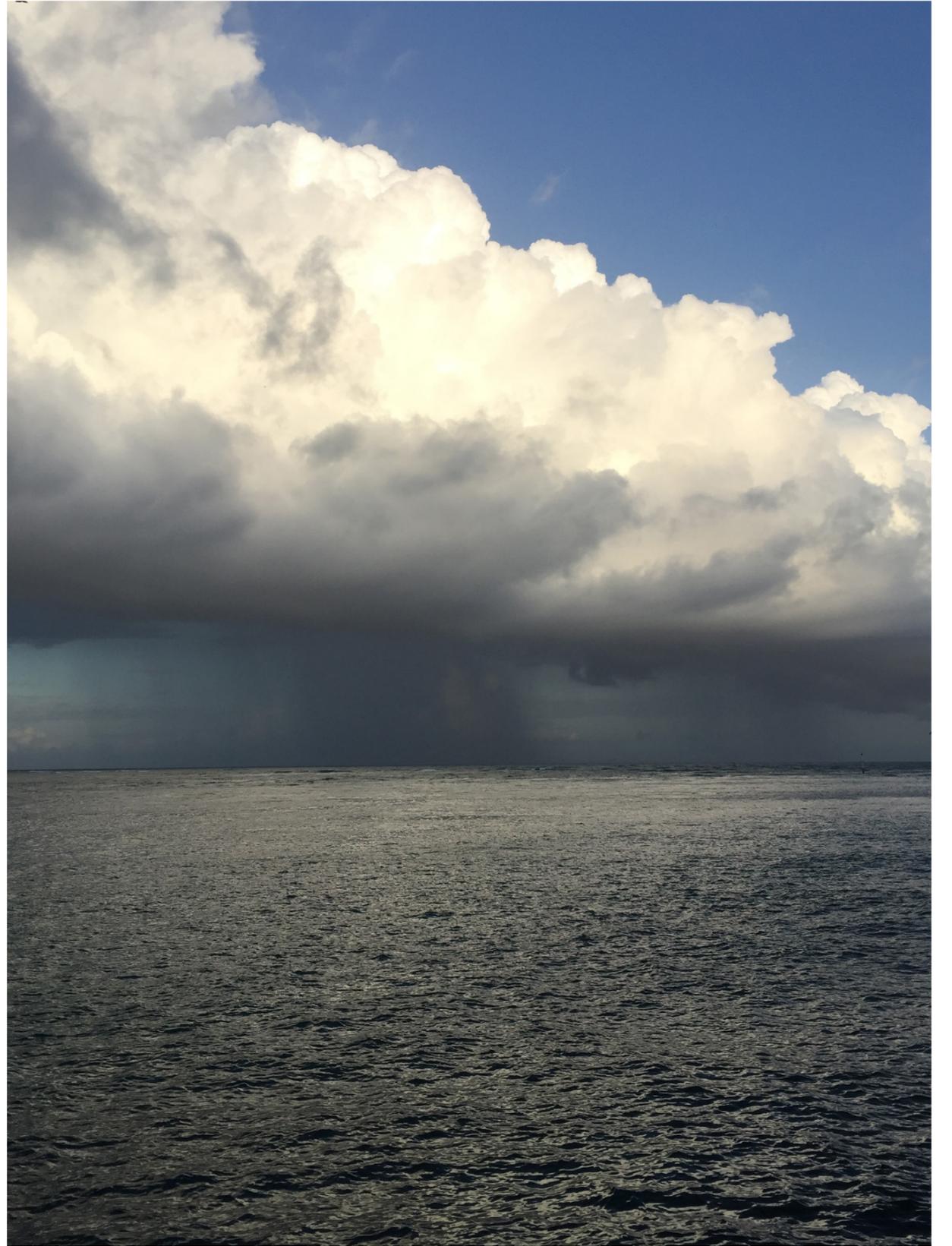
ON THE ACCOUNT OF THE BECOMING of being, one cannot confine a being to a particular category as either beautiful or not-beautiful. An individual being cannot be described as beautiful or not-beautiful because beauty lies in the web of wholeness. It is the whole in the sense of gestalt, which can be said to be beautiful. Applying this characteristic of the whole (i.e., beauty) to an individual entity is to turn the logic on its head. This is so because beauty means complete, perfect, and good. No single individual entity is complete, perfect, or good. These are, on the contrary, all characteristics of the whole. It is only the whole that is beautiful because of its completeness, perfectness, or goodness; the individual cannot be beautiful.



AND THIS IS THE DOMAIN OF THE STRANGE, the Marvelous, and the fantastic, a domain scorned by people of certain inclinations. Here is the freed image, dazzling and beautiful, with a beauty that could not be more unexpected and overwhelming. Here are the poet, the painter, and the artist, presiding over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucination and madness.



... Here at last the world of nature and things makes direct contact with the human being who is again in the fullest sense spontaneous and natural. Here at last is the true communion and the true knowledge, chance mastered and recognized, the mystery now a friend and helpful.







DEAR REEM,

I BEGAN THIS JOURNEY WITH YOU IN MIND. And as time passes on, I understand that this journey started much longer before I even was put on this world. The journey began thousands of years ago in the realms of the souls, when you chose me as your mother and decided, out of all the billions of souls, that I would be the one to be called a mother, by you. The ideas that I try to explain began when I had you. When I saw right before my eyes how you grew from a poppy seed, to a full human with thoughts, ideas, a sense of humor, and all of the necessary functions that go with being a human. My fascination with the unseen and the sentimentality of it came when I was verbally thinking about you, and I began to lactate. What was the connection between the body, the mind and the missing piece in between that conducted that physiological response in me? What kept me fidgeting when I was away from you, and when I got close to you, I was still? The questions arose in me slowly, and it worked its way up until this point, where I attained education as an attempt to grasp these questions. I learned many things that I cannot explain in this letter, but here are a few: I learned that it is alright to sit with the stillness and allow the work to emerge, because creativity is not from you, but from God and it is only by His permission that you have this ability, and it cannot be rushed.



I learned that there are structures in this world that can be harmful to your very essence, and it is imperative that you protect that part of yourself fiercely. I learned when to fight, and when to back down, I learned when to work hard and when to rest. Most importantly, I reconnected with a part of myself that had been alienated from me due to a trickster, as Bayo Akomolafe says, leading me to a path that leads to nowhere, and deciding that this path is dangerous not just for myself but ultimately for everyone else, as well. I wonder about the lessons you will learn in your path. Either way, I will be with you on that path until the very end.

With all my soul,
Mama Husna





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کوہری! ؎

A THESIS PRESENTED BY HUSNA SWALEH ABUBAKAR
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ASILI

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